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JANUARY 2007 VOLUME 9 ISSUE 10

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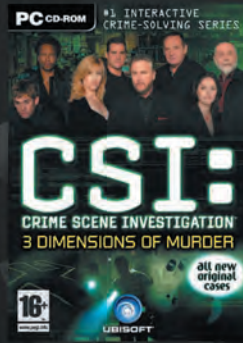
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To provide LightScribe capability right out of the box, the DRW-1612BL bundled Verbatim LightScribe-compatible discs (1 CD-R and 1 DVD-R) for the first month after the official launch.

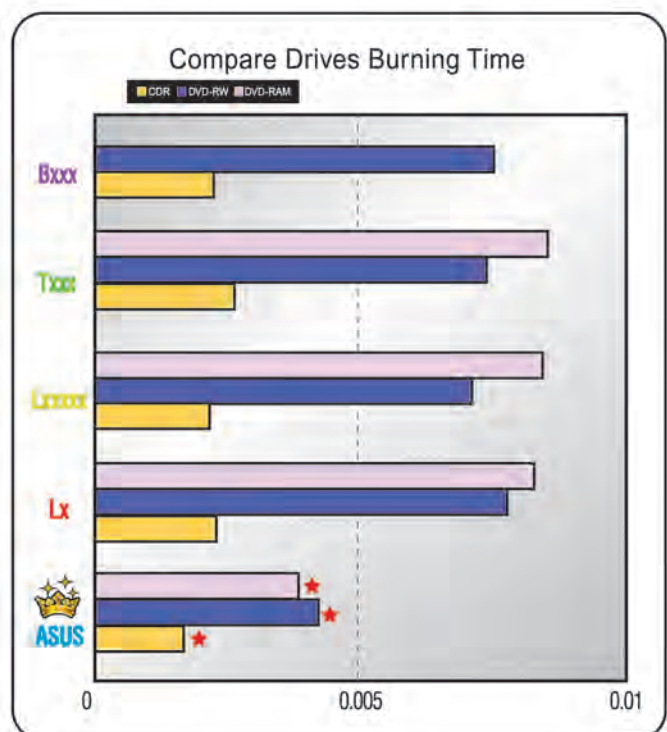
Versatile Media Format Support

The DRW-1612BL offers both 16X DVD-Write and 16X DVD+Write, making it capable of reading from and writing on DVD-Writeable/Rewriteable and DVD+Writeable/Rewriteable formats. With dual-format adopting features, the DRW-1612BL creates DVDs that can be played and read by most DVD-ROM drives and DVD players. It also enables 6X DVD-Rewrite, 8X DVD+Rewrite, 16X DVD-ROM, 48X CD-Write, 32X CD-Rewrite, 12X DVD-RAM and 48X CD-ROM providing flexible and high-speed operation.

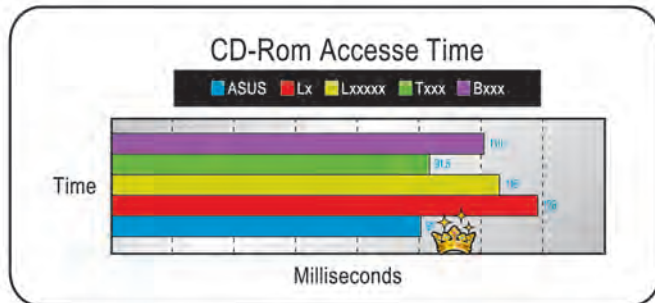
Testing the DRW-1612BL against competing solutions, it's apparent that the ASUS drive is benchmark leader.

(1)Data Burning Time: Compared with other drives, ASUS offers the fastest burning time in CD-R,DVD+/-RW and DVD-RAM.

	ASUS	Lx	L16000	T1600	B1600	Ranking
CDR	02:45	03:08	02:57	03:29	03:15	★ 1
DVD+RW	07:46	08:55	08:03	08:39	08:13	★ 1
DVD-RAM	05:58	11:53	12:09	12:17	N/A	★ 1



(2)CD-Rom Access Time: Winbench99 is the application for testing CD-ROM transfer rate and CD-ROM access time. When you run the CD-ROM test suite, WinBench 99 consists of the CD-ROM/Playback test and 3 other CD-ROM tests. For each CD-ROM test, WinBench 99 reads data from the CD-ROM and records the time it takes the PC's CD-ROM subsystem to perform the reads. The CD-ROM Access Time test performs random accesses on the entire CD-ROM and then reports the average access time in milliseconds. Each access is a 2KB read from a random sector on the CD-ROM. ASUS stands out from other brands.



(3)Lightscribe Burning Time Comparison: There are three modes for LightScribe cover burning: Best, Normal and Draft. The test results show that ASUS outperformed other brands when burning in best and normal modes. It took 20minutes and 37 seconds under best mode and 15 minutes and 43 seconds under normal mode.

Mode / Time	ASUS	Lx	Lxxxx	Txxx	Bxxx
BEST	20:37	21:18	23:09	24:51	25:29
NORMAL	15:43	16:26	18:17	18:54	19:19

(4)Lightscribe Printing Quality Test: The "Vision Measuring Machine" tests the quality of LightScribe laser inscriptions. The ASUS drive delivers the best and most professional labels.

LightScribe-Vision Measuring Test

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- Support Windows XP/NT/2000
- Multiple formats: DVD-ROM, DVD+R, DVD+RW, DVD-R, DVD-RW, DVD-Video, DVD-RAM, CD-R, CD-RW, CD-DA, CD-ROM Mode1, CD-ROM/XA Mode2, Photo CD, CD-I, CD-Extra, CD-Text
- Dimension: 148.5x42.6x173 mm
- Weight: 800g
- Bundled Latest NERO software and Verbatim LightScribe disc

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- 86** Open Season [Mob]
- 86** Saint's Row [Mob]
- 86** Splinter Cell: Double Agent [Mob]

ON THE DVD

DEMOS

Gothic 3 | Gunship Apocalypse | Heroes of Annihilated Empires
Once Upon A Time | Panzer Command: Winter Storm
RoboBlitz | Splinter Cell Double Agent MP
Splinter Cell Double Agent SP | Tasty Planet | The Mark
War Front MP | X-Avenger
ATI Catalyst v6.11 XP
NVIDIA ForceWare v93.71 XP
NVIDIA GEFORCE8 v97.02 XP

DRIVERS

Railroad Tycoon
Neverwinter Nights 2 | Ancestral Vale | Haunted House on the Hill
New Haven | Oblivion | Heros_Retreat_v12
Modular_Oblivion_Enhanced_r3

FREE GAMES MODIFICATIONS

BOTS
Battlefield 2 v1.41 | Battlefield 2142 v1.05 | Battlefield 2142 v1.06
Call of Juarez v1.1.0.0 | Company of Heroes v1.2.0 to v1.3.0
Dark Messiah v1.01 | Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter v1.35
Gothic 3 v1.09 | LEGO Star Wars II v1124
Warhammer Mark of Chaos v1.2 | Weird Worlds v1.2

ONLINE DEMOS PATCHES

TRAILERS

Army of Two | Command and Conquer 3 | Enemy Territory Quake Wars
Eragon | Gears of War IGN video review | Gods and Heroes: Melee
squad | Huxley | Lost Planet



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10/100 BaseT Intel LAN, Built-in Bluetooth
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DVD-Dual Optical Drive
Microsoft Windows XP Professional
Weight: 2.76 kg



YOU MIGHT NOTICE that your magazine bag feels lighter. You might also have noticed that fewer things fell out of the bag when you shook it. Finally, it must have dawned on you: there's no *360 Insider*. Sadly, the market can't yet support such a magazine, but it was an ambitious experiment anyway. Still, we didn't expect it to end so quickly, so quick in fact, that we haven't had a chance to gather a few memories. So keep those three issues somewhere safe and read Miktar's goodbye to what was a really nice publication.

Alas, the low rate of advertising you see around this time of the year has also hit *NAG*, which is 24 pages lighter this issue. However, we'll be back on form in February!

On a different note; after playing *Gears of War* and *Rainbow Six: Vegas*, I'll finally give the Unreal engine the respect it deserves. To me, the engines of id were always better, for various reasons, maybe merely as a matter of loyalty. However, the *Doom 3* engine is far behind Unreal Engine 3. So is *Source*, but it has so many strengths in other areas that it doesn't matter. Sure, *Crysis* still looms, but *GOW* and *REV* are from separate studios and publishers. Just imagine when the kinks get ironed out – *Call of Duty* (2004) used a heavily modified *Quake 3* (1999) engine.

I'm going to keep my eye on the new *Turok*.

James Francis [Editor]



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LETTER OF THE MOMENT

FROM: Lee Becker

SUBJECT: Gaming in Namibia

I have been reading your magazine for quite some time now and love to glance over the many letters sent in by your readers. The one thing that I've noticed is that South Africans complain a lot... about everything. For people who tend to complain that much, they don't really know how good they have it. If you think I'm lying, then just take a short trip over the border and then you can see what I'm talking about. I don't mean to Zimbabwe (because let's face it, they are worse off). But I'm talking of Namibia, which is also a stable and developed democracy. South Africans complain about not having cheap Internet - Namibia still doesn't have broadband or ADSL. You also complain about not getting the PS3 until March - Namibia didn't get the Xbox 360 until three weeks after SA, with a nice price increase of R300 *[could anyone e-mail and confirm this? - ED]* and only a fraction of the games released. Some PC/PS2 games (especially the popular games like *Titan Quest* and *NWN2*) we don't get till weeks after SA, if at all. An example: *Titan Quest* wasn't released until late September, much later than the SA July 4th release date, and they are almost always out of stock within a day, even though they are more expensive. Lastly, even your magazine is not available locally in Namibia - we have to subscribe to it at an increased price of R850 for a year's subscription. (For those of you who are interested, it is just over R70 per magazine.) You might think that I am ranting and in a way I am, but my point is that you should be happy with what you have in South Africa, it really isn't that bad. And if you really aren't happy then do something about it - write a petition or complain to the right people. You really, really don't have it that bad.

Well, there you have it. We don't have it all that bad. Until the next Telkom bill arrives, that is.



The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by EA South Africa. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch.

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Cyber mail: letters@nag.co.za
Important: Include your details when mailing us, otherwise how will you ever get your prize if you win...

TOPIC FOR NEXT MONTH:

What crap did you get for Christmas?



THE PLATFORM THAT STARTED THE ENTIRE FPS GENRE IS BEING GIVEN THE LEAST AMOUNT OF ATTENTION.

our time: inverted or not? Seriously, some people get annoyed when you can't set the inversion on both x and y axis. So it's really about taste. Sure, you aim less on a console, but an analogue gives you a really steady line for sniping. Sadly, the consoles are syphoning FPS games off the PC, COD 3 being the latest casualty.

FROM: Benjamin van Zyl

Subject: Violent games aren't just to blame

I think people like to blame videogames because it is a convenient excuse. A good example of this was the Columbine shootings: sure, those kids played violent videogames and listened to Marilyn Manson. Everyone blamed those as the motivation for them to go on a killing spree, but no one really bothered to look at the environment they are living in. I often play violent games and listen to Marilyn Manson and other 'violent music', but the difference between me and the Columbine kids is a healthy home and school environment. The point is that those kids didn't sit down and play violent games and then decide to go and kill a whole lot of people - they were being bullied at school, left at home unsupervised and uncared for. They used games and music as a way to escape their reality and basically lived their lives through the music and games they played because they didn't have a normal life outside the virtual one. They had no one to tell them otherwise or slap them over the back of the head when they got too aggro. So in the end you can blame videogames, but the real issue is the environment in which (especially) children play violent games and their ability to distinguish between games and reality.

Here's another warning sign: If you're a teenager, you shouldn't have a gun!

FROM: Johan de Lange

SUBJECT: Non-teenage gaming

In reply to Miktar's article in the November issue 'Old folks gaming', I would like to say that I am 35 years old, been a gamer my entire life and still enjoying it tremendously. As a wee lad, I started playing games as soon as I was old enough to reach the controls on the 20c arcade machines. I have fond memories of collecting empty

FROM: Craig Martin

SUBJECT: FPS and consoles

I have nothing against consoles. In fact, I regularly take part in the joys of 'pick-up-and-play' gaming. I love racing titles and platformers. However, I am regularly frustrated whenever I see an FPS title on a console. Now the obvious argument would be that console owners also want to play FPS titles, and that's fair. But trying to play a title like *Black* or *Call of Duty 3* with a PlayStation 2 or X360 controller is a nightmare! I always end up feeling that I have to 'twitch' the controls to get the shots I'm looking for. There's no fluid motion to it, or these games are given an auto-aim system, which takes away the actual aiming part of playing an FPS.

On the whole, these games annoy me completely, but what makes it worse is that there seems to be more FPS titles launched on console than the good ol' PC every month (please correct me if I'm mistaken). I can't even find out if *Call of Duty 3* will be launched on PC or not.

As a PC owner, I feel left out. The platform that started the entire FPS genre, and is tailor-made for it, is being given the least amount of attention. Although I will say, with much glee, that the FPS titles that have been released on PC lately have been stunning in comparison to the multitude released on console.

Playing FPS on a console versus a PC is about as complicated and intimate an argument as the other big question of

A LOT OF THE YOUNGER GAMERS PERHAPS MISS THE POINT OF PLAYING COMPUTER GAMES: HAVING FUN.



Coke bottles to trade in for refunds at the café, in order to satisfy my craving for *Asteroids* and *Battlezone*. My first computer was a Commodore 64 (a machine ahead of its time), which I received as a Christmas present in 1984. At university I had a 286, and can categorically state that I failed second year Algebra solely because of my addiction to *Civilization I*. We marvelled at *Wolfenstein 3D*, muddled till the wee hours of the morning and were insanely jealous of the rich kids who could afford math copros.

And now? With a wife, two kids and a hectic job, I don't get as much time to game as I used to. However, I buy NAG every month, play all the demos and buy the odd game when the review intrigues me. A few of my friends (and brother-in-law) who grew up around the birth of gaming, are aged between 35 and 40, and we still get together occasionally to play *Far Cry*, *Quake 4*, *Fear* etc. Right now I am really enjoying *Civ IV* and *Prey*, and am eagerly awaiting *Supreme Commander* (I cannot count the number of hours we used to spend multi-playing *Total Annihilation*).

There are definite advantages to being an 'older' gamer: you can afford a decent gaming PC (or new console) without having to beg somebody to buy it for you; you don't have to deal with whining little kids at LAN parties with their obsession with CS and childish flaming wars; when the stresses of everyday life (traffic, work) get to you, there is nothing quite as satisfying as cracking a couple of beers and dismembering some Nazis or Strogg with your mates; and you're allowed to say things like "In my day, we got by with 4-bit colour and 16 sprites..."

Sure, you cannot compete with the youngsters any more in the reflex stakes. However, a lot of the younger gamers perhaps miss the point of playing computer games: having fun. It's not always about the most frags, the best graphics card or what is better, PC or console.

So to sum up, the short answer is no, not all older people play *Bejeweled* and listen to Neil Diamond while doing so (I fondly recall *Fear Factory* doing the soundtrack for *Carmageddon*, and Trent Reznor (NIN) for *Quake*). In 10 or 20 years, who knows? I might just be lurking around an online game forum, playing

Quake IX, happily fragging kids old enough to be my grandchildren.

Your mail made Miktar very happy, so happy in fact that he bought new slippers and let us wheel him out onto the patio. There he told the neighbourhood kids stories about the bad (good) old days of gaming... then had a nap.

FROM: Jack Man

SUBJECT: Change is good

Everybody is always excited when a long awaited sequel of a great game is released. The normal gamer enjoys the chance to play something else, but not the pros. They stick to the same thing all the time. Most *Counter-Strike* tournaments are still held with 1.6. The pros are so used to the game that when *Source* hit the shelves, they already hated it. *Warcraft 3* adapted the most, but there are still thousands of *Starcraft* players out there. Then of course there is *Quake*. The CPL chose *Quake III* over *Quake 4* this year.

There are a select few pro gamers who like change, like *FatalIty* and *GarpY*. Doesn't that show more skill? Mastering a new game every year or two, as opposed to playing the same game for five years. *Quake III* isn't even available on the shelves anymore. Only old pro gamers are going to participate, and that means the e-sport community won't benefit at all.

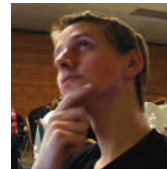
They claim these old titles are better for spectators! Have you played *CS1.6*, *Starcraft* or *Quake III* recently? You can barely make out what's going on. Viewers want to see new cutting-edge graphics. Change is a good move forward not backward.

Maybe pro gamers should just decide on a free game everyone can get. Before you can play football, you need an actual ball with a shape you can rely on.

FROM: Billy Pengilly

SUBJECT: Hackers and Hacking

I was recently the victim of a hacker or something/someone of that sort at work. We lost all our data and they defaced our Website. So I would just like to say a few words on hacking, as I have a different opinion of those criminals. You probably get a few good ones, but at the moment majority rules. Hacking is a relatively old issue. There are many ways to define hackers,



THERE ARE A SELECT FEW PRO GAMERS WHO LIKE CHANGE, LIKE FATALITY AND GARPY. DOESN'T THAT SHOW MORE SKILL?

but in my opinion their position as reckless criminals who endanger companies and individuals outpace their positive effects.

Nowadays there is a lot of evidence as to the harm and the loss that they cause big companies and individuals. Overseas' companies have the most hacking activity, which rapidly increases over time. However, hackers are like a double-edged sword. Besides their disadvantages there are the positive impacts that they have on the technological world. Hackers are considered the computer criminals' cause, but it's different from company to company and from person to person. If we try to make a comparison by putting in balance the innovation and the damage that hackers cause, we can see they are like two sides of a coin. The graph of the losses goes very high, compared to that of innovation, so there is no evidence of calling hackers computer innovators.

Considering all the cases in which computer hackers are involved, we can clearly see what they are. Every day people make an effort to escape the 'lethal' hands of hackers. Revising all the above, I can say that hackers are reckless criminals who endanger companies and individuals.

The big thing that arrived when the Internet became a cultural phenomenon is Script Kiddies. These characters aren't really hackers. Rather, they are able to download the right software and spread havoc. Script Kiddies are like forum trolls – retarded people with access to a keyboard. A proper hacker would have been in and out of your system without you even knowing it (and before we get e-mails about these being crackers or not hackers, we don't really care).

FROM: Lynette Shipley

SUBJECT: Solid Snake + Sam Fisher

Won't it be great if *Splinter Cell* and *Metal Gear Solid* were combined into one game? Then you can use both games' characters!!! It would be so cool!

What would that give us? Solid Sam, Snake Fisher, Sam Snake, Solid Fisher. Wait, we've got it: Solid Sam 'Snake' Fisher! The only man to disable a mech with a knife! Funny you should mention it, but MGS creator Hideo Kojima also happens to admire Splinter Cell. **NAG**



BYTES

WII FOR WIICTORY!

NEW NINTENDO CONSOLE OUTSELLING PS3 BY 2-1 MARGIN

AND THE VOTES ARE in! Well, not votes, but sales figures - and numbers don't lie (although they can fib). In terms of unit sales, the Nintendo Wii beat the PlayStation 3 (going on sale the same weekend) by almost double, with 628,870 Wiis sold compared to 318,829 PS3s (up to November 28). With its head start, the 360 has already sold over 7,617,823 units.

The proficient numbers of Wii sales could, of course, be attributed to its price advantage: the Wii costs \$250 and includes a game. The two PlayStation 3 versions cost \$500 and \$600, with no bundled games. The 360 sells for \$300 and \$400, with no games included.

The first person to own a Wii, Isaiah 'Triforce' Johnson, started queuing outside the Nintendo World Store in New York a week before launch. "I had to get it first," said the 29-year-old. He even got to shake the hand of Nintendo American president Reggie Fils-Aime. Fils-Aime said the company made "some very tough choices" in designing the Wii.

"Tough choices about not including a DVD player at the





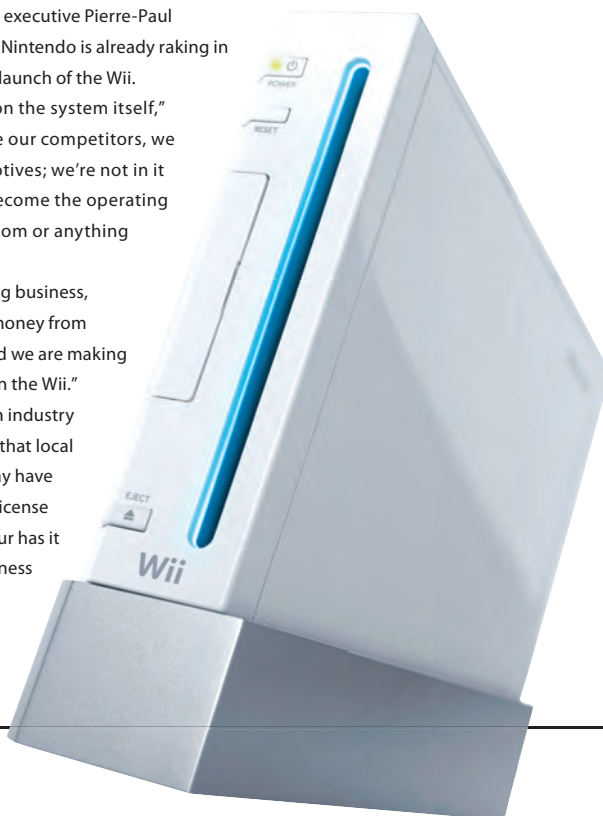
start, tough choices about not including high-definition capability at the start. That's because we wanted a mass-market price, and we believe the market will validate those decisions come launch day this Sunday," he said before the launch. It was unusual for a Japanese company to launch its console in the US two weeks before Japan. Nintendo says it made the call to get in on the US holiday shopping season, which starts earlier than Japan's.

Nintendo of Canada executive Pierre-Paul Trépanier has said that Nintendo is already raking in the cash following the launch of the Wii.

"We make a profit on the system itself," Trépanier said. "Unlike our competitors, we don't have ulterior motives; we're not in it to sell HD TVs, or to become the operating system in the living room or anything like that.

"We're in the gaming business, and we have to make money from everything we sell - and we are making money from day one on the Wii."

On a sadder note, an industry insider has mentioned that local distributor Futronic may have dropped its Nintendo license for South Africa. Rumour has it that the Nintendo business model doesn't work for the South African market.



PLAYSTATION 3

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SNIPPETS

YOUR ESSENTIAL INFO, NOW IN BITE-SIZED PORTIONS!

UK mag *What Mobile* has awarded its Game of the Year to Gameloft's *Mission: Impossible III*. Gameloft also won the award two years ago for *Speed Devils*.



New Zealand has removed game consoles from all its youth prisons, stating that it fears the games don't help rehabilitate the inmates with violent tendencies.

Ziff Davis has released the sad news that the *Official PlayStation Magazine*, or *OPM*, will be no more. The magazine's final issue will be in January 2007.



Not that it helps local gamers, but Novalogic has released games like the *Delta Force* and *Comanche* series on download service *Gametap*.

If you fancy wasting your time on an in-depth Flash game, check out *Grow Cube*. Through careful arrangement of objects on a cube, you try to get everything to work in harmony. It's very addictive. www.eyezmaze.com/grow/cube/index.html



GEARS KEEPS ON TURNING

IT'S BEEN A VERY busy month for *Gears of War*, Epic's recent next-gen Unreal Engine 3 powered action/horror. Within the first week of launch, *Gears of War* took top spot for the most-played Live game (unseating *Halo 2*), and continues to hold strong. Not unexpectedly, *Gears of War* sold over a million copies in its first two weeks and even boosted Live registrations by 50% since its launch.

Microsoft VP of Global Marketing Jeff Bell let slip that Microsoft already considers the franchise a trilogy. "The goal of the ad was to establish Marcus Fenix as the hero of the *Gears of War* trilogy." Microsoft has denied claims that *Gears of War* will be coming to PC (anytime soon), after a marketing image showing a *Gears of War* 'Games for Windows' display box hit the Internet. Epic's Mark Rein sided with Microsoft on this one. "Could we, in the future,

adapt *Gears* for Windows just as Microsoft did with *Halo*? Sure we could and, as you can see, Microsoft is clearly cool with that idea. But we're a long way off from thinking about that."

Rein remains amped and recently did a bit of thinking on the Epic company forum. "*Gears* is a trilogy? If we can keep making quality games that fans obviously want, then why would we have to stop at three? I don't see the *Metal Gear Solid*, *Mario*, *Grand Theft Auto* or *Final Fantasy* series (among others) stopping at three, and they're still delivering compelling entertainment content that's easily worth the money (see *Unreal Tournament* as well)."

Elsewhere, general manager for EA Montreal, Alain Tascan, let slip his viewpoint of the game. "What is *Gears of War*? I mean *Gears of War* brings nothing in terms of innovation to the shooter... Like, zero."

WILL GERMANY LOSE CRYTEK?

GERMAN LAWMAKERS ARE CONSIDERING a crackdown on "violent computer and simulated war games" in the wake of a recent school shooting. A disgruntled 18-year-old ex-pupil, who was described by students and teachers as "a youth with no friends who liked guns and videogames", stormed his former high school, shot five people and

then later killed himself. In 2002, Germany saw a similar shooting where an alienated former pupil and computer games player shot 16 people, mostly teachers, then later himself.

Wolfgang Bosbach, the deputy head of Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU), said it was time to consider banning games that simulate wanton killing. "We need effective guidelines to protect children from exposure to different types of media, but we don't need (simulated) killer games which can lead to brutalisation," Bosbach said.

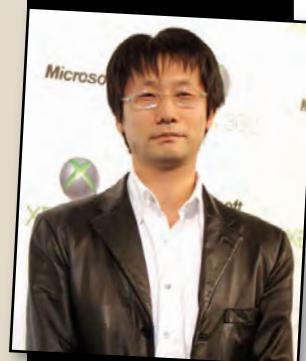
Reports have surfaced that German game-developer Crytek has gone on to say that it would leave Germany if 'ego shooters' were banned.



HIDEO MISSES THE RUMBLE

HIDEO KOJIMA SAYS A lot of things, especially on his blog [www.blog.konami.jp/hideoblog_e/]. Recently he talked a bit about his upcoming *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*. The game doesn't take place only in the Middle East, but also South America and Eastern Europe. You'll be able to choose and switch which faction you align yourself with. Kojima also explains how 4 will be different:

"To use a funny analogy: in the past, the *MGS* series was like a bank robber trying to rob a bank at night, so there are guards, cameras, etc. And when you get spotted, you're instantly identified as the robber. But in this game, you're going into the bank at midday. You might just be a customer going in to make a deposit, but you still have to sneak in to accomplish your mission. So you're trying to deceive. You're on camera, so if you do weird things you'll be spotted as the robber, but if you're careful you won't. "That said, I miss the rumble, and even now I hope it will come back."



PLAYSTATION 3

COMING MARCH 2007



SQUARE/ENIX EYES EUROPE

PRESIDENT AND CEO OF Square/Enix, John Yamamoto, thinks that Europe could become a bigger market for them than Japan, and is even looking to acquire a European developer.

"I am very interested in European development because there are a lot of very good independent studios," said Yamamoto. "We have started having meetings with people right now, and we will keep going. Titles I'm looking at are for Europe and also

the US. We are not looking to hire staff one by one, so maybe studios that have good experience would be easier to work with."

He also expressed that every producer in Square/Enix was keen to release all of their titles into the European market, especially the ones that were previously exclusive to the East.

"We have been making titles exclusively for one format for a long time, but now we have titles for all formats."

PS3 LAUNCH LINE CHAOS

VOCIFEROUS ANTI-GAMING ADVOCATE

JACK Thompson must be gloating all the way to his soapbox, because if the PS3 launch is anything to go by, videogames almost certainly do inspire violence in the masses.

Two teenaged thugs in Connecticut kicked off the festivities in the early hours of the morning, robbing fifteen or so line-waiters at gunpoint, and shooting one who refused to hand over his cash. Another three people were mugged in Oregon, while an armed robbery of a shop in California bagged an undisclosed number of the sought-after consoles. In Kentucky, there was a drive-by BB-gun shooting (!), injuring four people including a local news reporter, and a teenager in Wisconsin, who was caught in a stampede, ran headlong into a pole and had to be hospitalised. Scuffles broke out in a San Francisco crowd spanning three blocks when it was announced that there were only 750 consoles in stock, and the mayor of Boston has vowed to bill Sony for riots which prompted the intervention of twelve police cruisers, as 500 frenzied geeks rushed the doors of the Sony store there.

Elsewhere, enterprising would-be eBay



auctioneers paid homeless people as much as \$100 to wait in line for them.

Meanwhile, amid all the chaos and scheming, one bemused onlooker took pity on the dozen or so fan boys shivering outside the local Best Buy and bought them a round of hot chocolate. He later urged others to follow his magnanimous example, stressing that "these people might be trampled to death at any moment."



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According to a Japanese promo box, which will bundle a 360 and *Lost Planet*, the consoles will have HDMI outputs. Is a new 360 revision already heading to the market?

Alternative MMO *Second Life* was hit by digital Grey Goo. Grey Goo is a nano technology that spins out of control and replicates until the world is doomed. In this case, it was a worm that replicated golden rings every time a ring was touched. Admins had the mess cleared up soon, though.



Nintendo watches the *DS* money. The company announced that the handheld has sold seven million units in the year and a half since its launch in Europe. Six games also broke the million mark there, with *Nintendogs* selling a whopping four million units.

Fresh, bold, upbeat and feminine – this is how Computec Media AG describes *Play Vanilla*, the world's first gaming mag aimed at female gamers. The first issue will appear in March 2007 in Germany.

William Shatner told Gamespy that he only gave his voice to *Star Trek: Legacy* after Bethesda begged him to do it. The veteran actor added, tongue in cheek, that **Leonard Nimoy** won't be doing the same, because not even his own wife really wants him.



EBAY: THE DARK SIDE OF THE PS3

E BAY MARKETPLACE RESEARCH REPORTS that in the weeks preceding its much-anticipated retail release on Friday 17 November, over 3,500 PS3s had already been flogged to desperate buyers for around \$2,000 a pop. With a dramatic shortage of consoles, this figure soared to an average of \$2,900 on launch day. Shrewd pre-sale receipt holders and those intrepid souls willing to brave the riots cashed in a considerable profit on a \$600 item.

In this volatile arena of *canis canem edit* were the inevitable dupes and scams, like the myopic patsy who neglected to read an ad properly and forked out \$900 for "Sony PlayStations, 3 of them" – only to receive three PSone consoles (without controllers). One careless seller accidentally listed his PS3 as a 'Buy It Now' item, and was forced to sell it for just \$9.99, while a rather creepy Kentucky resident tried to sell his for \$1,000,000 – including shipping, handling, and "lifelong friendship". Another crazy hopeful auctioned a grilled cheese sandwich "not fit for human consumption", promising to throw in a PS3 if the winning bid was \$10,000 or more.

Following hasty restocking and availability and a general calming down, however, these figures have fallen precipitously to around \$1,100 the next day.



MARIO'S DAD TURNS 54

O N 16 NOVEMBER 16, Japanese game designer Shigeru Miyamoto turned 54. Creator of *Mario*, *Donkey Kong*, *The Legend of Zelda*, *Star Fox* and *Pikmin*, he is one of the world's most celebrated designers. It is not uncommon to hear him called 'one of the fathers of modern videogaming'. Shigeru was employed by Nintendo (back when it was a Hanafuda card game manufacturer) as an artist in 1980, and given the task of designing one of their first coin-op arcade games. The result was *Donkey Kong*, which later spawned *Mario* who would go on to become Nintendo's mascot. In celebration of his birthday, here are a few interesting things about Shigeru: He is ambidextrous but prefers to use his left hand, and he plays the guitar and the banjo.

RULE OF ROSE STAYS OUT OF BRITAIN

T HE EUROPEAN JUSTICE AND security commissioner, Franco Frattini, launched an all-out attack against *Rule of Rose* in November. He said the game contained "obscene cruelty and brutality" and would not only promote violence in children, but violence against children as well. The horror game is the creation of Japanese developer Punchline and tells the tale of a girl and her dog who must escape the Rose Garden, a dilapidated orphanage in 1930s England, which is controlled by the Aristocracy of the Red Crayon, a society created by the other orphaned girls. The game has heavy horror themes with an under-current of erotica which the developer defended as unintentional.

"If we look at it through the eyes of adults, when girls play with each other in this way it may be considered somewhat erotic," explained Shuji Ishikawa (the game's director) to Gamasutra. "But with kids, I really don't think they'd see it that way. It's more genuine, not lustful. It may appear so because these are things kids actually do, but we don't want to see." The game was rated 16+ in Europe by PEGI, which called Frattini's comments nonsense. Sony, which published the game in Japan, declined a US release. Instead, this went to Atlus and the game was rated M. However, Frattini's comments have caused a storm, including front page condemnation by Britain's tabloids. As such, the game's release in the UK has been cancelled, with parts of Europe likely to follow.

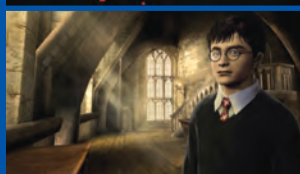




MOVERS & SHAKERS

DOA FANS, LISTEN UP! At a recent anniversary dinner for the series, producer Tomonobu Itagaki said that there will be a **Dead or Alive 5**. He didn't specify a platform (360, most likely) and resumed drinking afterwards. Another franchise going strong is **Call of Duty** and a source close to the game spilled the beans that apparently the game will take place in modern times and that it will be so detailed, you may be able to shoot ears off. On that macabre note, let's talk about zombies. The flesh eaters are central to the first game from Turtle Rock, a group known for a great CS bot. **Left 4 Dead** will be a co-op multiplayer game where up to four players can kill zombies and even more players can control the zombies. Source engine, in case you wondered. The sequel juggernaut which is EA moves on with another Harry Potter game. Scheduled for June 2007, **Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix** will be the series' first next-gen title. The screenshots look a bit too good, if you ask us. GRAW fans can also look forward to a sequel. Ubisoft revealed that **Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2** will have dynamic weather, crazy lighting and more. It all sounds awesome, but we'll have to wait and see. 360 owners salivating over PS3 games **Fatal Inertia** and **Bladestorm** need not feel excluded – Koei has announced that the two games will also come to Microsoft's console. Unfortunately, the PS3's recent launch means that new title announcements are still a month or so away. Fortunately this won't be a problem once the console launches in March, but in the meantime, PS3 owners will also have to wait for **Oblivion**, which has been delayed. The good news is that **Lair**, **Motor Storm** and **Heavenly Sword** will be released by March. PC owners also have a delay to face: **Half Life 2: Episode 2**, along with **Portal** and **Team Fortress 2**, has been delayed to mid 2007. The same goes for **Rainbow Six: Vegas**, which will now take a bit longer to reach the PC, PSP and PS3.

PSP owners, though, have a couple of new titles to look forward to. **Sid Meier's Pirates** is being ported to the system, so is Vivendi's **Scarface**. Meanwhile, despite the series' support for Nintendo's platforms, it doesn't look like a **Castlevania** game will appear on the Wii soon. Producer Koji Igarashi said that he doesn't want to make something gimmicky, such as using the controller as a whip. Funny, we thought that would be a great gimmick! Finally, two RPGs are returning to us soon. Fans of the cult game **Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga** can expect the sequel to arrive in early 2007, while **Blue Dragon** fans are already talking about a sequel, even though the game is yet to be released...



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LOST & FOUND

Every month in honour of our favourite TV show *Lost*, we'll hide the Dharma Initiative logo somewhere in the magazine. It could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find it and send an e-mail to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line [Dharma January]. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win... absolutely nothing! This month is special: while you're searching high and low for the Dharma symbol we're also searching... for a new sponsor for this competition. If you're keen, send mail here: ed@nag.co.za.

LAST MONTH'S WINNER



Laurence da Silva, p39

360 SURVIVES HIT AND RUN

We've always wondered how strong the 360 is, considering all the Microsoft mice we've failed to break when we accidentally stepped on them. One owner found out when he was involved in a car accident in November. The impact sent his Xbox 360 flying out of the window as his truck rolled four times. He came off lightly with just a bruised elbow, but his truck and 360 are totalled. At least, that's what he thought, until he took the 360 home, plugged it in anyway and found it to be working perfectly. Check out more of the damage at www.wackynoodle.com/360/.



VIDEOGAMES BLAMED FOR GERMAN SCHOOL SHOOTING

"THE ONLY THING I really learned at school is that I'm a loser," wrote an 18-year-old student, before wrapping himself in explosives, donning a trench coat and gasmask, and opening fire on his peers. Thirty-seven people were injured before the boy turned the gun on himself. What prompted this gruesome outburst? When he wasn't ordering weapons, explosives, and ammunition online, being bullied, or posting blogs detailing his plans to "let it all out at some point to take revenge on all the arseholes who wrecked my life," Sebastian Bosse apparently enjoyed playing *Counter-Strike*.

Now a coalition of German moral authorities is howling for a national ban on 'killer' games, including paintball and lasertag. If passed, this new legislation

would effectively prohibit the selling of any games that depict lethal violence.

This comes in the wake of the recent condemnation of videogames by American priest, Germogen Tucker, who cites the work of a 3rd century monk to back his claims that there is an inexorable causal relationship between videogames and real-life violence.

"If we see violence, and do not dismiss it immediately," wrote the sage St. Hesychius, "it then becomes a compulsion that we attempt to act on." If this is true, perhaps one should consider not whether playing violent games affected Bosse, but why he didn't 'dismiss it immediately' like everyone else. For now, however, it would appear that such obvious questions are beyond the scope of this investigation.

THE EVOLUTION OF COUNTER-STRIKE



Counter-Strike Beta 1 [1999]



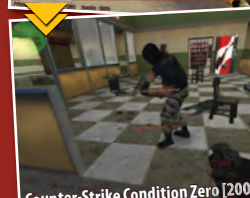
Counter-Strike Beta 4.0 [1999]



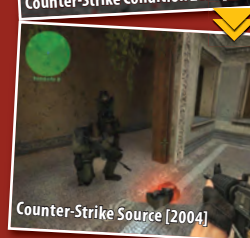
Counter-Strike Beta 6.1 [2000]



Counter-Strike Beta 7.1 [2000]



Counter-Strike Condition Zero [2004]



Counter-Strike Source [2004]

FREE GAME OF THE MONTH

GYROBALL

URL: www.miniclip.com/games/gyroball/en/
GENRE: Action/Puzzle

VERY BASIC BUT POLISHED clone of games such as *Marble Madness* and *Marble Blast Ultra*, *Gyrobball* is a small Flash game that has you racing the clock. You control a gyro-ball (marble) with the arrow keys and need to manoeuvre it to the goal. Along the way, the level tries to throw you off by using ramps, bumps and speed-arrows. The first level is deceptively easy and requires a little patience, while the later levels require precise skill and dedication to complete. Perhaps we're masochistic to recommend this game, since it is addictive and utterly frustrating at the same time. For a Flash game, *Gyrobball* is remarkably polished, but we recommend turning off the music - it'll drive you insane before the difficulty does.



CAPTION OF THE MONTH

EVERY MONTH WE'LL CHOOSE a boring, odd or peculiar screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better [funny] caption. The winner will get a free game from Vivendi Universal Games. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject [January Caption].



JANUARY CONTEST

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT:
"Smells like fish. Tastes like chicken."



DECEMBER WINNER

Eastgate Mall Security Training Manual, page 17: "How to handle unwelcome hawkers."

- Enslin Van Niekerk

RULES: (1) If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. (2) If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve to win things. (3) Obey all posted speed limits. (4) Never run with scissors. (5) There is no spoon. (6) Don't tell me what I can't do!

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DID SONY MESS UP GAME EXCLUSIVES?

TWO OF THE MOST highly anticipated games for the PS3 in 2007 will now no longer be exclusive to the console. This comes after Ubisoft and Take Two/Rockstar signed deals with Microsoft to launch their titles on the Xbox 360. According to a post on *Newsweek's* site, Sony PlayStation chairman Ken Kutaragi is to blame for not getting back to the publisher about exclusivity. He has taken a lot of flak for this, but is it his fault? Sony shot back at *Newsweek* by saying that it has the confidence in its console, without having to dig deep into its pockets to buy the rights to these two games. However, people are now speculating whether or not Sony is as financially sound as previously thought. It could also be due to the fact that the PS3 launched in the US only a week after Japan's launch, allowing Sony very little time to secure some exclusive Western developers. With Sony breaking away from its practice of exclusivity and *GTA IV* being the follow-up to the previous exclusively PS2 titles of a similar name, one does begin to wonder. The other game in question is *Assassin's Creed*, which could certainly have helped Sony initially boost its sales, but now it seems that it's an even race between all three of the consoles to establish supremacy. However, Sony did secure two additional episodes for *GTA IV*, which was something Microsoft initially announced as exclusively its own.



BUDGET TOP 20



1. Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones



2. Rainbow Six: Lockdown



3. Heroes of Might and Magic III & IV Complete



4. The Settlers: Heritage of Kings



5. King Kong



6. Far Cry



7. Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory



8. Age of Empires Gold Edition



9. Silent Hunter III



10. Prince of Persia: Warrior Within



11. CSI: Miami



12. Lock On: Air Combat Simulator



13. CSI: Dark Motives



14. CSI: Crime Scene Investigation



15. Playboy: The Mansion Gold Edition



16. Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield Gold Edition



17. Microsoft Flight Simulator 2002



18. Rayman 10th Anniversary



19. Zoo Tycoon



20. The Bard's Tale

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Guild Wars has started a closed Beta in China, with plans to release the full game there soon. It will be hugely popular – over 200,000 people registered on the day that the news broke. Will China become competition for the dominant South Koreans?



Frozen Codebase is a new developer comprised of industry veterans. Recently approved by Microsoft to develop for the 360, the developer doesn't rely on publisher advancements. Instead, it uses venture capital, giving the team a lot more creative freedom.

EVE Online developer CCP will be merging with **Vampire: The Masquerade** creator, White Wolf. The aim of the new company will be to create new IP for MMOs, not to mention White Wolf's own range of games, including **Hunter**.

THQ is not having the best of days. The publisher is one of several companies being sued over stock grant and control irregularities by their shareholders.



Call of Duty developer Infinity Ward has relaunched its official site to include more community features such as podcasts and friends lists.
www.infinityward.com

WOW Glider is a program that allows players to automate online play in **World of Warcraft**. Basically, if you want it to loot gold, you can set the software to do it for you while you do something else. Blizzard has taken legal action against it, but **WOW Glider** is fighting back because Blizzard wants to stop distribution of the software – something which is outside its legal rights.



LIVE GETS TV SHOWS AND MOVIES

MICROSOFT IS FINALLY MAKING a zero loss on the Xbox 360, reported Techspot.com. Apparently, due to a reduction of 40% in manufacturing costs and streamlining orders, a Core unit now makes MS \$75, but most of that goes into shipping. With this in mind, Microsoft has started streaming full length movies and television shows on Xbox Live for as little as \$3 and up to \$6 for high-definition new releases. Currently this is only for Xbox 360 users in the US, but it will hopefully spread internationally in the future. Up until now we have only seen trailers and short-length movies, but imagine watching *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* or yet another episode of *Lost* on your Xbox 360 in true HD or even SD quality. Americans have all the luck!

What we in South Africa can currently look forward to is the possibility that Microsoft may lower the price of the Xbox 360 as it has recovered its costs. MS can still not compete with the Nintendo Wii in price, but it can make it extremely difficult for Sony, who has yet to release its console in Europe and Africa. This is all speculation for now as Microsoft hasn't announced anything, but we can all hope.



TRADE A PS3 FOR...

WHAT WOULD YOU TRADE A PS3 for? US gamers queuing for their launch units were given these tempting offers:

JOIN THE HARDCORE

One PS3 fan gave up getting a unit for a cutting edge PC. *PC Gamer* magazine took a dual-core machine with a new 8800 GTX to the San Francisco PS3 launch and gave it to a guy named Neil, who is now contractually obligated never to own a PS3.



TACOS FOR LIFE!

Taco Bell has offered a lifetime's supply of tacos to the first gamer who hands in their PS3 to the fast food chain. In exchange, the gamer will be credited with tacos vouchers to the value of \$12,500 – or a taco a day for the next 54 years. The PS3 goes to a charitable cause.



WHAT WOULD RON JEREMY DO?

A radio DJ sent his people and a mobile phone to a queue in Santa Monica where porn icon Ron Jeremy offered queuing gamers this offer: an all-expenses paid trip to the Bunny Ranch, a well-known legal brothel in Nevada. And he meant All Expenses, if they forfeited their place in the launch line. Tempting? Not enough, it appears, as there were no takers.



MODS OF THE MONTH

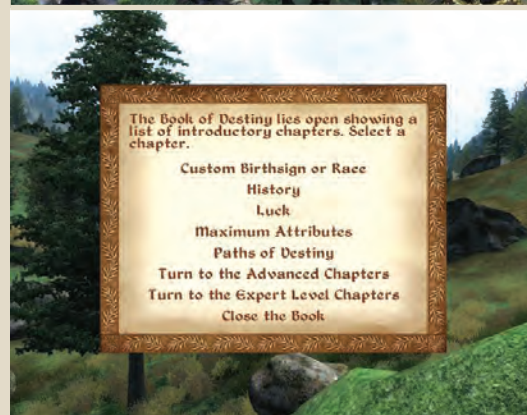
FRANCESCO'S LEVELED CREATURES ITEMS MOD AND KOBU'S CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT SYSTEM

GAME: *The Elder Scrolls: Oblivion*
URL: <http://www.tessource.net/files/cache/2518.html>
<http://www.tessource.net/files/file.php?id=1888>

LIKE ITS PREDECESSOR, *The Elder Scrolls: Oblivion* enjoys the attention of quite a few active modders. Ranging from small visual enhancements, to extensive gameplay overhauls, the Website www.tessource.net has 4,903 mods on its download list. Two of these mods are worth combining: Francesco's Leveled Creatures Items Mod, and Kobu's Character Advancement System.

Francesco's is primarily a creature and item level scaling mod, making only some of them level with the player. It also offers tweaks and enhancements to a myriad of gameplay elements, from the length of days, to how quickly you gain skills and level-up. In addition, two mods from other authors are included, namely Combat Behavior and Living Economy. All of these are modular and each feature can be installed separately. An item add-on is also available at <http://planetelderscrolls.gamespy.com/View.php?view=OblivionMods.Detail&id=268>.

Kobu's system changes the way the player gains levels. There is no levelling screen. It assigns attribute points automatically as you gain experience, and it increases your level, based on a chosen mathematical formula. As a result,



level progression becomes smoother and less of a chore, keeping it behind the scenes and allowing the player to focus on role-playing rather than levelling.

CHARTS

PC GAMES

#	Title
1	Need For Speed: Carbon
2	Cricket 07
3	Flight Sim X Deluxe
4	Rainbow 6 Las Vegas
5	Pro Evolution Soccer 6
6	Battlefield 2142
7	The Sims 2
8	Happy Feet
9	Eragon
10	Splinter Cell: Double Agent

PLAYSTATION 2

#	Title
1	WWE Smackdown vs Raw
2	Need For Speed: Carbon
3	Buzz Sports Quiz
4	Tony Hawk Project 8
5	Mortal Kombat Armageddon
6	Singstar Legends
7	Superman Returns
8	The Sims 2 Pets
9	Eragon
10	Cricket 07

PSP

#	Title
1	Grand Theft Auto Vice Stories
2	WWE Smackdown vs Raw 07
3	The Sims 2 Pets
4	Need For Speed: Carbon
5	Tekken Dark Resurrection
6	Mortal Kombat Unchained
7	Medal Of Honour
8	Marvel Ultimate Alliance
9	Prince Of Persia Rival Swords
10	Pro Evolution Soccer 6

XBOX 360

#	Title
1	Need For Speed: Carbon
2	Gears Of War
3	WWE Smackdown vs Raw 07
4	Eragon
5	FIFA 07
6	Gears Of War
7	Open Season
8	Call Of Duty 3
9	Tony Hawk Project 8
10	F.E.A.R.

The **Wii** might be great, but the strap around the remote appears to be rubbish. Soon after the console launched in the US, a few reports started surfacing of smashed displays, thanks to over-zealous swings that caused the strap to snap and the remote flying. One report states that a laptop screen was totalled by the impact.

The **PS3** is experiencing problems with backwards-compatibility, even with major titles such as **Gran Turismo 4** and **Guitar Hero**. Owners can avoid disappointment by checking Sony's online list.

www.jp.playstation.com/ps3/status/

The 360 might be growing its appeal in Japan, but it's far from the top and far from the PS3. On the weekend that the PS3 launched, it sold over 88,000 units, while the 360 only sold around 4,000.

Some details on how to hack your **Wii** have already surfaced.

wiihacker.blogspot.com



A study by Nottingham Trent University claims that out of every nine MMO players, one is addicted. The study involved 7,000 online gamers, of which 12% showed signs of addiction.

Rumour has it that Xbox Live will soon host **Double Dragon** as a download. Obviously, if that's true, it will support online co-op play. We can't wait, but here's hoping Microsoft fixes the 360's dodgy D-pad before that.



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Mario is promoting pasta! It's not clear if this is an official endorsement or not, but the Italian plumber appears to be the new mascot for a Belgian range of pasta. Funny, when we think of Mario we think of big monkeys and dragons, not pasta.

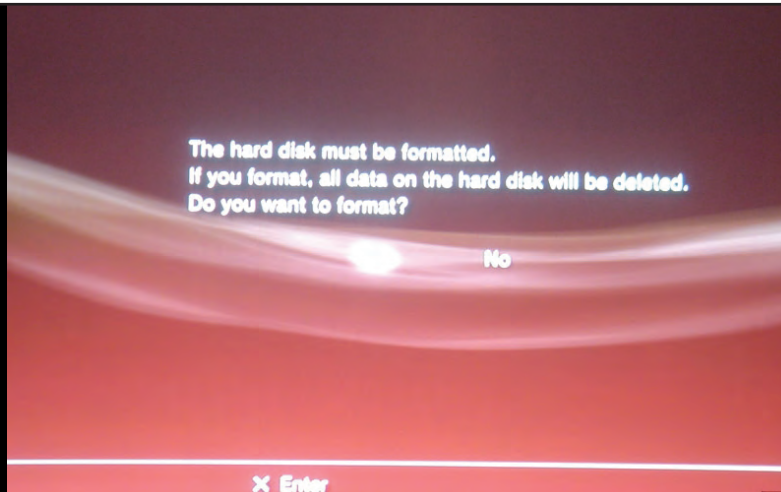
Working with NCSoft, the FBI has pounced on and shut down L2Extreme, a service that gave people illegal access to *Lineage II* servers. L2E reportedly served over 50,000 users.



Mobile publisher Glu has opened an office in Sao Paulo, Brazil, showing its support for the market. The company also opened a Hong Kong office earlier in 2006 and bought UK company iFone.

Tech site *The Inquirer* speculated that because of the great cost involved in manufacturing next-gen consoles (Sony loses over \$200 per PS3 sold), hardware companies will have to drive down costs – as has happened with the 360 and Wii. The site believes that this could start a serious price war between the three consoles.

An engineering student got *Fedora Linux* to run on his PS3 within hours of buying it. Since then, using Linux, gamers have been able to run emulators like MAME on the system. This has led to Nintendo emulators and PS3 owners playing *Mario Bros.* on their new systems.



HOW TO REPLACE YOUR PS3 HARD DRIVE

THE PLAYSTATION 3 MAY not be set for release here until around March, but that doesn't mean you can't file this away for future reference. Website GamersReports posted an interesting article on how to replace a PS3 HDD with a larger one, including photos. You can find the article at www.gamersreports.com/article/43/, which makes the process look surprisingly easy (in contrast to replacing a 360's HDD). The hardest part it seems, is buying the correct HDD - it has to be a 2.5-inch SATA HDD. After that, you simply pop off the plastic cover of the HDD bay on the PS3, remove the blue screw and then replace the HDD inside the caddy. This does void your warranty of course, so don't do this if you ever want to send your PS3 in for service.



KEYBOARD, MOUSE AND DUAL-SHOCK ON 360

HAVE A 360, BUT you just don't like playing an FPS on a controller? Maybe you prefer typing instead of sending voice messages, or perhaps the 360 controller isn't your type and you want the comfort of a good old PS2 Dual-Shock controller. Then you'll want to own the XCM 360 XFPS. Apart from rolling off the tongue, it will also let you connect a keyboard, mouse and Dual-Shock controller to your 360. The XCM might not work for all games, though, so wait for a few reviews.

[www.xcm.cc]



AGEIA PHYSX TURNS ROYALTY-FREE

AGEIA HAS ANNOUNCED THAT its PhysX engine will now be freely available with no royalties to all developers. This comes as no surprise considering that the PhysX cards have not done exceptionally well in the market, as well as the fact that new cards that support DirectX 10 are starting to appear. AGEIA lost precious market share because of a simple fact: which is better; a graphics hardware card or a dedicated physics processor? This has now been put to

rest with the GPUs made for DirectX 10, which have a lot more ability than previous generations, including physics. It will be a good opportunity for new developers to show off what they can do with this engine, which should give a boost to the overall growth of games globally. The PhysX software also supports a wide range of both PCs and consoles and has put out some of the best physics effects in quite some time, and it will be available on both the PC and PlayStation platforms at no cost.



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JANUARY CALENDAR

Release date information supplied by kalahari.net



3

RELEASE: Star Wars Battlefront 2 Platinum (PSP)
Date TBA ▶



6/7

NAG FUN FACT:
We make this stuff up as we go along.

10

ON THIS DAY: In 1996, *Tomb Raider* was released for PC, forever changing the face of women in gaming. ▶



11

RELEASE: Street Golfer (PS2)
Date TBA
RELEASE: Raiden III (PS2)
Date TBA

12

RELEASE: Lost Planet: Extreme Condition (360)
LAN: Carnage.LAN - Cape Town (www.langames.co.za)
RELEASE: Rengoku 2 (PSP)
Date TBA
RELEASE: Toca Race Driver 3 (PSP) Date TBA

13/14

RELEASE: World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade (PC)
RELEASE: Forty 4 Party (PS2)
Date TBA
RELEASE: Radio Helicopter (PS2) Date TBA
RELEASE: Soccer Life II (PS2)
Date TBA

15

RELEASE: Nancy Drew: Danger on Deception Island (PC)
RELEASE: Nancy Drew: Secret of Shadow Ranch (PC)
RELEASE: Nancy Drew: Curse of Blackmoor Manor (PC)
RELEASE: Nancy Drew: Secret of the Old Clock (PC) Dates TBA

16

ON THIS DAY: In 1997, *Simpsons* creator Matt Groening autographed a house with spray paint. Owners almost ate their own shorts. ▲
RELEASE: World Tour Soccer 2 (PSP) Date TBA

17

RELEASE: Sno Cross (PS2)
Date TBA
RELEASE: Tokobot Plus: Mysteries of the Karakuri (PS2)
Date TBA
RELEASE: Capcom Classics 2 (PS2) Date TBA
RELEASE: Ar Tonelico (PS2)
Date TBA

18

RELEASE: All Star Fighters (PS2) Date TBA
RELEASE: Party Carnival (PS2) Date TBA
RELEASE: Zombie Hunters (PS2) Date TBA
RELEASE: Eagle Eye Golf (PS2) Date TBA

19

LAN: Organised Chaos - Cape Town (www.langames.co.za)
RELEASE: The Warriors (PSP)
Date TBA
RELEASE: Black & White (PSP)
Date TBA
RELEASE: Guilty Gear (PSP)
Date TBA

20/21

RELEASE: Anno 1701 (PC)
Date TBA
RELEASE: Sherlock Holmes: The Awakening (PC) Date TBA
RELEASE: Paraworld (PC)
Date TBA
RELEASE: Barrow Hill (PC)
Date TBA



24

RELEASE: Rail Simulator (PC) ◀

25

RELEASE: Jade Empire: Special Edition (PC) Date TBA

26

RELEASE: Sabotage (PC)
RELEASE: Guilty Gear Dust Strikes (DS)
RELEASE: Starfox Command (DS)

27/28

RELEASE: Dungeon Siege: Throne of Agony (PSP) ▼
RELEASE: The Lord of the Rings (PC) Date TBA

29

ON THIS DAY: In 1972, Atari released the original *PONG* arcade game. After only a single night in a bar, the unit was so full, change spilled out of the coin slot.

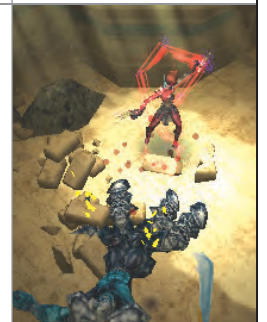
30

ON THIS DAY: In 1998, LucasArts released *Grim Fandango* for PC. Critically acclaimed, financial failure.

31



RELEASE: Prince of Persia: Rival Swords (PSP) Date TBA ◀
RELEASE: Rainbow Six: Vegas (PSP) Date TBA



Only
R308.66



Only
R308.66



Only
R308.66


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MIKTAR'S MEANDERINGS GOAT SEX

By Miktar Dracon

THERE ARE A LOT of things that get my goat, excluding pesky ungulate pilferers. What gets my proverbial caprine does include (but is in no way limited to) games that put heavy emphasis on sniping, abrasive antagonistic gamers, and limited-run BBQ-sauce chicken burgers.

One of those is not the same, that's true. Everyone has to deal with the occasional overzealous gamer and his (and it's always a him) self-righteous philippics, at some point in time. Naturally, this magazine is not exempt from the trolls that inhabit every dank, dark corner of the gaming metaverse - their watchful gaze ever

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vigilant for opportunity to 'stick it to the man'. Like the noble lamprey, these 'gamers' swim in circles until an opportunity presents itself. The magazine serenely rolls over for a nice bask in the sun... then they suddenly strike! Lightning-quick, saccharine double-talk latches them on to the host and once attached, they're simply content to revel in baseless vilification until their own prepubescent lust is sate.

When called out to account for their actions with the hope of catharsis, these ghoulish individuals are quick to hide behind an indignant farce, spewing vitriol like a pus-filled boil lanced. Naturally, nothing they say is worth a damn and their lamentations contain about as much substance and intelligence as an article in *Beeld* about how the various Pokémon names are actually the names of the satanic Japanese gods. It always amazes me to what lengths some people will go, just to avoid dealing with the pain of being a virgin.

Let me digress here for a minute, with a little theory of mine regarding such things as forum trolls. Humanity as a whole does this thing called progressing. It's a complex system of interlocking societal mechanisms that gradually propels the entire species forward. Nifty, I know. This so-called progression yields much advancement, especially in the field of medicine.

Let's take epilepsy as an example. The word itself is derived from the Greek *epilepsia*, which literally means 'upon seizure' or something. In ancient times, epileptic attacks were associated with demons and other religious hoo-hah. It's a little ironic that even Hippocrates (460BC) remarked that epilepsy would only be considered divine until it was understood. Today, we understand epilepsy and can even treat it.

Now let's fast forward a few years. Medical science, in all its glory, unveils some pills you can pop to treat Abrasive Societal Syndrome, or A.S.S. as I call it. These wonderpills effectively stop a troll in his tracks, by treating the chemical imbalances in his brain that cause him to waste other people's time. A little lithium here, some selective-serotonin re-uptake inhibitors there, and suddenly the Intarwebs revel in a complete troll enema.

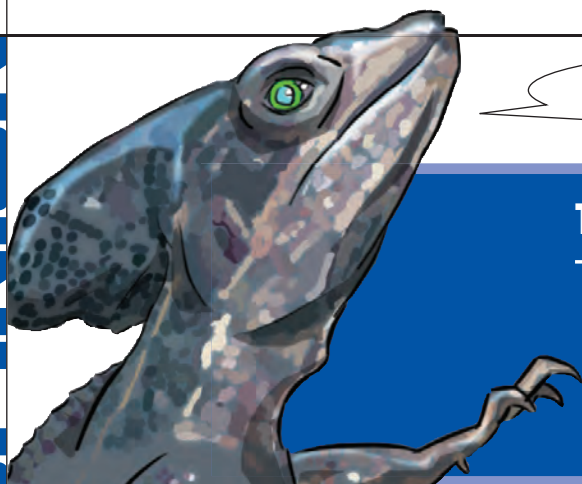
But is that really the answer to our online antagonist problem? I'm not a big fan of medicating people's problems away, especially after discovering that Attention Deficit Disorder (A.D.D.) is actually just an alternative learning method, and not a disorder as claimed. Many kids, treated with Ritalin for ADD (before sexual maturity), are now permanently impotent.

Then again, if medicine produced to treat A.S.S. leaves a troll unable to copulate, perhaps that is a blessing in disguise. **NAG**



Baa means NO!

The views and opinions cited in this column do not necessarily reflect those of NAG Magazine and its staff.



But he was still TROGD00000RRRR!!@#!

THE DOMAIN OF THE _BASILISK THOU SHALT NOT COVET THY NEIGHBOUR'S OPERATING SYSTEM

By Anton Lines

SO I'VE JUST BOUGHT myself a Sony laptop. Before you ask, the answer's yes. I did this incomprehensible thing knowing full well that, in the past few months over seven million Sony lithium-ion batteries have been recalled on account of spontaneous combustion. I did this mind-bogglingly bizarre thing while in possession of the knowledge that I was paying several thousand rand more than I would have for a significantly faster machine from almost any other manufacturer. I did this fundamentally preposterous, ludicrously insane thing with the complete understanding that Sony laptops come installed with so much utterly useless crap that Windows in its default state requires over 700MB of RAM to operate.

But what I didn't know is that Sony laptops use the most obscure SATA drivers known to the human race. Known to the human race perhaps, but certainly not to Windows XP Professional setup. I honestly believe it's part of the 'use anything other than the default configuration at your peril, mortals!' strategy that Sony seems to love so much. Of course, it's understandable in a way. How else could people be persuaded to keep running Windows Media Center Edition?

To be fair, this laptop isn't marketed at gamers. It's designed for the corporate professional who wants to manage his spreadsheets and watch the occasional DVD. My primary motivation for the purchase was the Sony display – which, I might add, is worth every penny – and I use it mostly for writing. However, having even an elementary knowledge of computer technology, I'm not going to be satisfied with a product that performs below its own capacity. I want the performance I paid for. I don't want all the try-out software, I don't want all the updates and special offers, I don't want the fifty million gimmick controllers that do precisely nothing of interest, and I sure as hell don't want Media Center Edition.

So I hauled out my XP Professional CD and slipped it in with delight. I watched with quivering eyebrows as the files were copied to the hard drive and awaited, with heart-pounding anticipation, the product key dialogue. But no, setup was unable to detect any hard drives on this computer and couldn't continue. that's right, setup, having just copied the install files to the hard drive, is unable to detect a hard drive.

If this was a desktop machine, it wouldn't have been too much of a problem. Windows setup makes provision for unknown SATA, SCSI or RAID drivers, by allowing you to import the files **but** you can only

**I WANT THE
PERFORMANCE
I PAID FOR.
I DON'T
WANT ALL
THE TRY-OUT
SOFTWARE,
I DON'T
WANT ALL
THE UPDATES
AND SPECIAL
OFFERS**

do so from a floppy disk. And modern laptops don't have floppy drives. Not to mention Sony laptops don't come with driver CDs or disks anymore; they come with an install partition on the hard drive, which doesn't help me in the slightest.

Fortunately, I have friends with more than just an elementary knowledge of these things. The solution, it turns out, is rather ingenious. It's called 'slipstreaming' and involves modifying the Windows install files in order to include the otherwise unknown drivers (and additional service packs, et cetera). I won't go into the process in detail here, but it basically entails copying the setup files to your hard drive, integrating the drivers into the setup config, stealing the boot image from the original CD, and writing all the new information to a new disc. Wow, what a bloody mission. Thanks Sony, for wasting a day of my life and two blank CDs (used the wrong driver file initially), just so I could rid myself of your worthless user-friendly software. Now please don't make my battery explode.

For anyone interested in how to slipstream Windows XP setup, a detailed guide can be found at http://maximumpc.com/2005/01/how_to_slipstre.html. **NAG**



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DAMMIT MERRY ADDICTIONS FOR 2007

By Megan Hughes

CHRISTMAS HAS COME AND gone, leaving in its wake a trail of tinsel, ripped wrapping and fine pine needles from that must-have Christmas tree. The New Year's party has also come and gone, leaving behind a serious hangover and plenty of stories with which to blackmail your friends with this year.

This festive season did bring a little surprise for me, although it wasn't surprising to find that the South African postal service had lost my Christmas wish list, somewhere between here and the North Pole So, those wishes went unheard (for 2006 anyway).

My surprise came in the shape of a festively wrapped box, carefully placed inside a shiny blue gift bag; along with an overlarge shot glass and a cute stuffed animal, which seems to be a cross between a puppy and a monkey. That aside, the card attached confirmed that it was a gift for me (I like to ensure that I don't go around stealing other people's presents, because they generally have bad taste). Gently peeling off the red wrapping paper, or more correctly shredding it, revealed a brand new copy of the game *Evil Genius* for the PC.

Of late, I have been experiencing a 'dry spell' when it comes to gaming. Granted, I haven't had vast quantities of time to spend on my hobby, nor a monster machine which would allow me access to every game imaginable, nor the cash to afford new games or upgrades. However, the games I have recently been exposed to have left little motivation to continue in my quest for ultimate escapism.

Games are supposed to grip the gamer right from the loading screen, happily forcing the gamer to stay glued to his (or her) chair for as long as he (or she) can possibly hold out. With or without amazing graphics, a game should capture the imagination and provide a fun-filled escape from life. Lately I've merely played games to pass the time

IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE I HAD SPENT A WHOLE DAY CAPTIVATED BY ANY GAME, COMPLETELY OBVIOUS OF TIME

between more exciting activities. I really don't want to spend money on a game that I'll happily put away after only thirty minutes.

Evil Genius changed all that for me. I'd heard many good things and was keen to see if the game really lived up to its reputation. I had it loaded before breakfast the next morning and started implementing my evil plans to take over the world. After a while, I decided that it was probably a good time to have breakfast before continuing. It was then that I realised that I was way too late for breakfast and would have to settle for lunch instead. Minutes later I was back at the game, keen to increase my notoriety from 'Horrible' to 'Insane.' Some inconsiderate individual felt the need to interrupt me to inform me that it was already dinner time.

I couldn't have been happier. It's been so long since I had spent a whole day captivated by any game, completely oblivious of time. This is the kind of thing I have been searching for, and hoping to come across, in the other games. Even some of the demos I've played have been less than inspiring, none encouraging me to rush out and pre-order anything except takeaway food.

But what has happened to the industry? Where have all the good games gone? Surely the makers of *Evil Genius*

haven't stolen all the original ideas? Although, considering the fact that they came up with *Evil Genius*, I shouldn't be surprised.

Hopefully, 2007 will bring many more addictive games, and hopefully many more addicted gamers. The future's still bright, with some impressive-looking titles coming out this year, but we will have to wait and see. In the meantime, I'm off to take over the world... **NAG**





KINGPIN NEW YEAR AND THE THINGS IT BRINGS

By Michael James

NEW YEAR'S DAY BRINGS with it more than just a headache, regret and general fogginess; it brings new hope, hope that this time around everything will be better. However, we all know it's just another day-night cycle in the cosmic scale of things, and what does the Earth and Sun know about that fat jolly man dressed in red, or that another calendar year is starting. The scary thing is that this feeling is all in your head, the same head that's been overindulging for the last two weeks. Funny - this human brain thing.

Looking back, this year has been an odd one (it's not technically over yet, considering that this text is being banged out only a week into December 2006). Last year, *NAG* was handed over to a new editor after close to six years under the old one. We've started a few new projects and closed them down, and the bigger this office grows the more it changes. I do miss the old days, but progress and growth must happen whether we like it or not. A nagging question comes to mind in light of all this. First off, are we losing our minds; and secondly, is this new version of *NAG* even remotely close to the old *NAG*. It's only been a year, but it feels like a lifetime. We're in constant discussion and debate about this topic, and I like the fact that it keeps coming up: it means we're not altogether happy with what we're producing each month. Complacency is like cancer, so we avoid it.

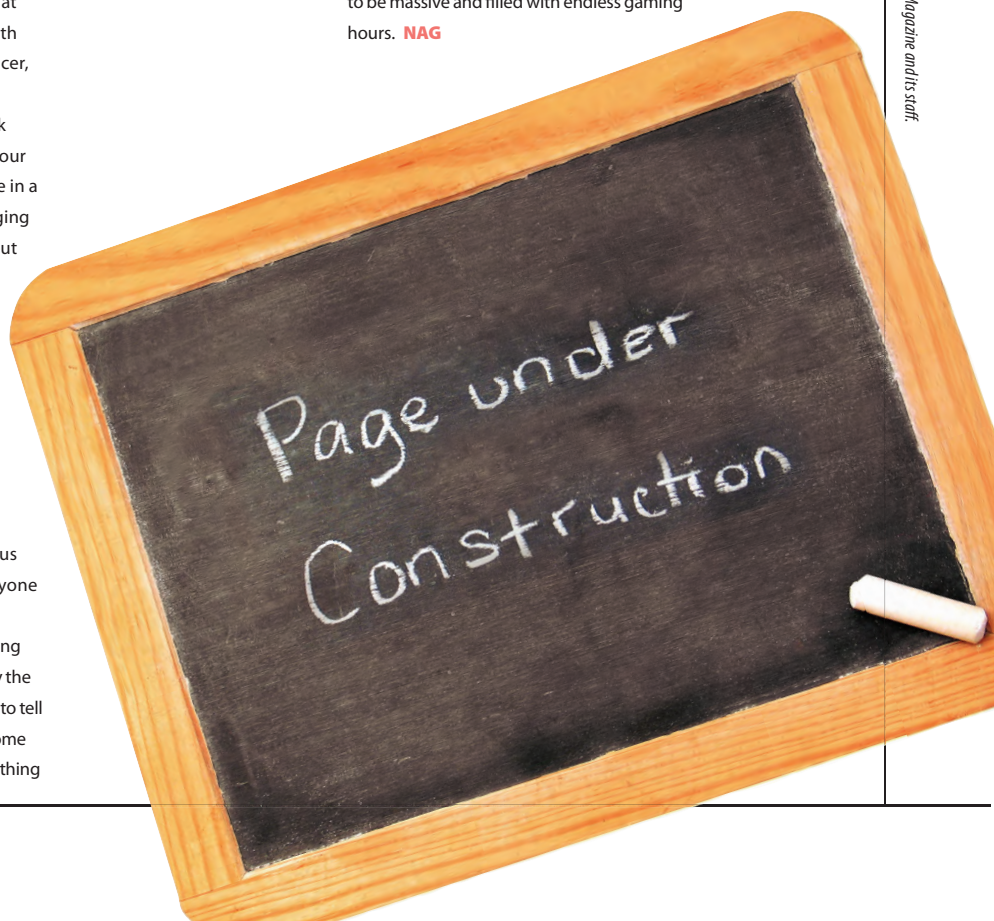
To try and answer this question we conduct surveys, look for feedback and try and interact in a meaningful way with our readers and advertisers. However, ultimately the answers lie in a different place, so we tweak and fiddle without really changing things too much. We have our little systems here and without them, I think everyone will be lost. You know the kind of systems I'm talking about: for example, a one-page review consists of 400 words, a summary, a few images, and the almighty score. Why not just write the review until you're done? Why even have screenshots, and can we possibly even ditch the score? These are all good ideas and out of the system thinking, but we must consider the readers, and they mostly expect us to be different and radical while still staying the same - much like sequels of games. Therefore, the rules of conformity are there to hold us back, yet we are expected to innovate. Fortunately for everyone concerned, we know all this and can work around it. In this regard, we'll be setting this industry on fire in 2007, starting with the March issue and bringing it up to warp 9 (as it were) by the April issue, and hopefully perfecting things in May. I would like to tell you what we have planned, but there are spies everywhere - some of them are even reading this right now. We're looking at everything

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in the magazine, and while some changes might only be a simple font style, others will be entire new sections or something else. Nevertheless, let's not hype it up too much; we all know too much hype always equals bitter disappointment.

THE REST OF GAMING IN 2007

There are some pretty big releases coming next year. I'm not supposed to tell anyone anything specific, but I can drop hints and say a lot without saying anything. First up is a big announcement from Activision (and we're not talking about *Quake Wars* here), and considering id Software titles are distributed by Activision, we can all hope it has something to do with id Software's new intellectual property they were talking about a few months ago. There's also some definite stirring in the bushes when it comes to Blizzard (shall we be bold and say the name *Diablo III* out loud); *Command & Conquer 3* is also coming (say no more); *Tomb Raider* will be returning; and the PS3 is looming. This isn't everything I'm excited about for 2007, but I have to hold back in case I say something I'm not supposed to and get scratched off the hot news list. In terms of entertainment (games, movies, and experiences), 2007 is going to be massive and filled with endless gaming hours. **NAG**



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ALL
OF
YOUR
CDs

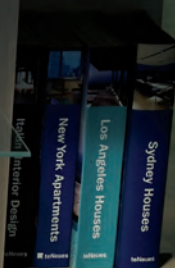
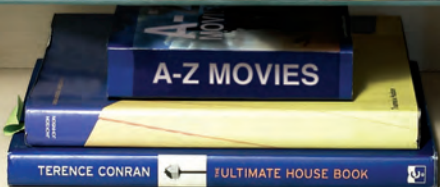


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THOUSANDS OF MOVIES



PSP

SOUTH AFRICA'S INTERNET SUPER SPEEDWAY NOW UP TO 4 TIMES FASTER!

Telkom recently signed its 200,000th DSL customer while shifting into high gear by upgrading its broadband capability into the realm of 4Mbps. This fixed rate, high-speed Internet access is the wheel of the digital era: turning and tuning the cogs of business and pushing the technological boundaries. In keeping ahead of international standards, Telkom has upgraded its DSL 192Kbps customers to a 384Kbps service - up to double the speed at no extra cost. Telkom also automatically upgraded its DSL 1024 customers, at no extra cost, to the highest speed possible - up to 4Mbps for a trial period. A precursor of what's to come!

HOW DO I FIT INTO THE FUTURE?

With its recent upgrades, Telkom now has three main offerings to choose from, specifically designed for your needs and budget: DSL up to 384Kbps, DSL up to 512Kbps, and DSL up to 1024Kbps (up to 4Mbps during a trial period). Good news - if you subscribe to DSL 1024, your service will automatically be upgraded to the highest speed possible, up to 4Mbps during the trial period.

Telkom's elite package, DSL up to 1024Kbps, offers customers access speeds up to four times faster than the fastest broadband speed available during the 4Mbps trial. Enabling download speeds of up to 4Mbps and uploads at up to 256Kbps, this is for those of you who want the ultimate broadband service. Experience a connection so fast it'll seem like the real world is slowing down!

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LAPTOP



XBOX 360



iPods



Touch tomorrow

SUPREME COMMANDER

THE ART OF WAR

Developer: Gas Powered Games Publisher: THQ Distributor: WWE [011] 462-0150 Genre: Strategy Platform: PC

WHEN HE ANNOUNCED THE SPIRITUAL SUCCESSOR TO *TOTAL ANNIHILATION*, CHRIS TAYLOR WAS THINKING BIG. WE DIDN'T REALISE JUST HOW BIG UNTIL WE CHATTED TO THE DEVELOPER AND TOOK A LOOK AT THE GAME THAT'S SET TO CHANGE THE WAY YOU LOOK AT REAL-TIME STRATEGY.

IT STARTS WITH A slow, consistent radar-ping. That first beep is enough to raise the hairs on the back of your neck. Very quickly, you eye the progress on your Strategic Missile Defense system, but the sinking realisation has already set in: it won't be done in time. The radar-ping speeds up, announcing the approaching nuclear missile. Soon enough, death strikes your base and the entire screen becomes a judder of pristine white. Flicking the mouse wheel down, you zoom out until you see the mushroom cloud rising, a true-to-scale confirmation of your defeat.

Lead designer behind *Supreme Commander* and founder of Gas Powered Games, Chris Taylor may keep reiterating that "almost all modern RTS games do not actually employ strategy... in reality they simply pit opponents against each other in resource wars". However, let's be honest here: it's always a race for the nukes, or the super-units. In *Supreme Commander*, however, this race is thrilling, and not just because the end-result is so effective (in both a gameplay and visual sense), but because the entire experience is RTS redefined and refined.

In the past, RTS titles have sized their units to fit comfortably onscreen. *Supreme Commander* has no such reservations. There are units so large they completely crush smaller units. One unit is so huge it completely fills the screen if you're zoomed in all the way. It's all about scale with *Supreme Commander*. The scale is so large that the land, sea and air battles rage realistically and a nuclear explosion will have you zooming out just to catch your breath. Such scope is made possible due to some fancy under-the-hood

engine programming, along with terrain that is dynamically tessellated (how long has it been since that industry buzzword has been thrown around?) as the camera zooms around. *Supreme Commander* will support the new DirectX 10 graphics cards, although information is scant. When asked about how the DX9 and DX10 versions will differ, Chris could only say, "What's looking likely is that we'll have some kind of procedural damage system [for DX10] and weather effects, but it's not official yet, so I want to leave the door open for that to change."

Chris has always been an outspoken critic of the 'rock-paper-scissors' design philosophy behind the traditional RTS. Making his point, *Supreme Commander* will not use the die-roll function to determine hits/misses and/or damage as most RTS do. Instead, the balance of units is determined by its simulation nature. All the units in the game follow true Newtonian physics and this changes the nature of battle dramatically. Speed, velocity, location and direction start to play a big part when everything has to adhere to the constraints of physics. For example, a turret placed behind a hill won't be able to shoot enemies beyond it. However, if placed atop the hill, not only will you be able to shoot farther, but each shot will do more damage as it will be assisted by gravity. The same goes for artillery placed high. Projectiles are affected by motion, so a moving tank will have a much lower hit rate than a stationary one. Fast moving airplanes will naturally be very effective against slow-moving bombers, while lower-technology turrets won't be able to turn quickly to take out faster units.

Strategy without tactics is
the slowest route to victory.
Tactics without strategy is the
noise before defeat.
Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

Due to this, the battles in *Supreme Commander* are more about strategy and less about accurate micro-management. To help players setting up strategic and tactical systems, *Supreme Commander* implements some incredible way-point, ferrying and construction mechanics. Setting way-points remains the same: holding shift will let you create a path for units to follow. What's new is that you can hold shift and reposition existing way-points, dragging them around to change flight plans, ground assaults and place units once constructed. Builder units can queue the build plans by holding shift, and you can cancel any build plan in the queue by right-clicking on its icon in the command bar. Using this, you can pre-plan and build your entire base within the first few seconds of the game, leaving you to focus on the big picture. A rather interesting touch is that the Sub Commander unit can guard buildings and if they are destroyed, automatically rebuild them.

In addition to the way-point system, you can also set up Coordinated Attacks. If one group of units has been given a series of way-points and an ultimate attack point, you can add additional units to the plan by giving other units way-point commands and then right-clicking on the attack icon of the first group. This will set up Coordinated Attacks where the faster units will slow down, allowing all forces to reach that point at the same time. By taking advantage of the incredible zoom range, you can use these tools to dictate the flow of battle at a much more strategic level, since the game handles most of the grunt-work for you. It is possible to play the entire game while completely zoomed out,



THE FACTIONS

UNITED EARTH FEDERATION

All hail the generic human faction, the 'good guys' trying to reunite humanity and restore the old Earth Empire. Humans like big guns, massive tanks and armour-plated death, which is exactly what this race provides. The UEF possesses the 'Major' Strategic Artillery piece (remember Big Bertha from TA?), the 'Fatboy' Mobile factory and the 'Atlantis' submarine aircraft carrier. All are devastating, but the UEF is also the only race that can equip their Armoured Command Unit with nukes. Go team!



AEON ILLUMINATE

The advanced philosophy and technology from an extinct race of aliens have brought the quasi-religious order of humans, the Aeon Illuminate, far. They're the pacifist faction who believes that the only way to guarantee the future is to unite everyone under their philosophical and scientific view. What it really means is that they're on an obsessive holy mission that will be achieved through the coercive assimilation of the rest of humanity. To this end, they have the 'Tempest' submersible battleship, the 'Czar' flying fortress and the 'Galactic Colossus'. The latter is a giant robot with a beam cannon and gravity claws that can pluck battleships from the oceans and crush them. You can't go wrong with giant robots.



CYBRAN NATION

The UEF aren't the boy scouts they pretend to be. A fear of the Cybran Nation, a race of human-computer Symbionts with enhanced everything, has led the UEF to oppress the Cybran and use them as glorified computers. The Cybran fight for liberation, demanding emancipation and a society of their own. They introduce the 'Monkeylord', which is every bit as fearsome as it sounds - a massive sex-legged spider-like robot, armed with a heat laser and cacophony of anti-air launchers and auto-cannons. Obscenely, it can even go stealth. The best part is that the 'Monkeylord' can crush smaller units underfoot. The other two Cybran experimental units are the 'Soul Ripper' experimental gunship, which is a blimp of death, as well as the 'Scathis' rapid-fire mobile artillery.



CHRIS TAYLOR



You may not know the face (Chris has never been as media-hungry as the other developers out there, though lately this seems to have changed), but British Columbia-born Chris Taylor has been in the industry for a long time. His first game released in 1989 was *Hardball II*, which won an SPA award for best sports game of the year. In 1996 he joined Cavedog Entertainment as designer and project leader for *Total Annihilation*. He founded Gas Powered Games in 1998 and went on to design *Dungeon Siege* and its sequel in 2005. The announcement that he was working on a 'spiritual successor' to *Total Annihilation* came in 2005.



ZOOM ME IN, SCOTTY

Something that has always been a bit of a sore-point with the RTS genre, especially since the advent of 3D, has been the 'roof' on zooming out. Normally you can't zoom out as far as you'd like, but *Supreme Commander* is mercifully different. You can go from ground-level (with astonishing detail), all the way out, until the entire theatre of war fills your screen. All commands such as attacking, moving and setting way-points work. When you've zoomed out a certain distance, units and buildings become 'Strategic Icons', which display a lot of information in a very condensed format.

FERRY ME THIS

Setting up an automated ferrying system is remarkably easy. You simply build a transport, and then click on its Ferry button. You can then shift-click to set way-points, while releasing shift will set the final position. This creates a ferry beacon at the start of the path. Any units then instructed to move onto it will be picked up, flown along the path and dropped off at the end. It even allows you to tell factories to output straight to a beacon, letting you set up mass air transport manoeuvres. Additional air transport is merely a matter of building more and right-clicking on a beacon for assistance. You can also move ferry way-points by simply holding shift and click-dragging them to new positions.

SIT NEXT TO ME

There is an interesting risk/reward system in *Supreme Commander*, which has to do with the position of your buildings. The Adjacency System allows certain structures to benefit from being built alongside others. Energy-consuming buildings will use less energy if built next to power generators. If built next to power storage, generators pump out more juice. If built next to power generators and mass fabricators/extractors, factories will use less energy and/or mass. So, you can run the risk of splash damage levelling your base by building tightly, or spread things apart at reduced efficiency.

DOUBLE-VISION

A quick key-press and you can split the screen down the middle (if you don't have two monitors for a more traditional dual-view setup, which the game does support). These two views can be moved, zoomed and

rotated individually, literally allowing you to be in two places at once. Way-points can even be created across the views, such as setting a transport to ferry units from your base to the enemy base.





thanks to the Strategic Icons which then appear. These icons represent the type of unit and what Technology Level that unit is.

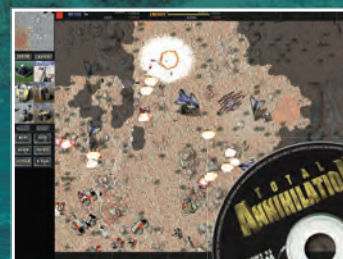
Supporting the war-efforts is the same resource model as in *Total Annihilation*. Two resource types, both inexhaustible, are generated by specific buildings. Energy can be obtained anywhere, while the other, Mass, is primarily found at specific locations. It can also be produced by trading Energy for Mass using Fabricators, but at great cost. Construction uses both resources while they are generated, meaning the resource system is dynamic. The trick is to balance your incoming/outgoing rates at which resources are collected and used. If your expenditure becomes higher than your income, all your build processes get clogged and slow down as they gulp what resources they need. It's not hard to set up a functioning economy in *Supreme Commander* and there is little babysitting involved. However, the super-units are an incredible drain, and you have to be sure of a powerful economy before you even attempt to build them.

Supreme Commander will sport three campaigns, one for each race, alongside capable online multiplayer with a global ladder. A lot of focus and emphasis have been placed on its moddable nature, and you will also be able to modify your user interface to more suit your tastes (in the same way people change their *World of Warcraft* UI).

When all is said and done, is *Supreme Commander* really a spiritual successor to *Total Annihilation*? "In the beginning I thought I was making a spiritual successor, but as the project gained momentum, I realised more and more that *Supreme Commander* wanted to become its own game. Now I feel that it has its own identity and people who play it may have little or no interest in my previous efforts. I think it's important that it stands on its own now," Chris Taylor remarked. **NAG**

TOTAL ANNIHILATION

Known internally at the now non-existent Cavedog Entertainment as *Really Cool Wargame*, the radical *Total Annihilation* turned a few heads in its release year back in 1997. It was the first RTS to feature 3D units and 'mostly 3D' terrain, in the dark ages before hardware-based 3D acceleration. *Total Annihilation* is now nine years old, like a ripe dog. Nevertheless, unlike a ripe dog, *TA* is still actively played today.



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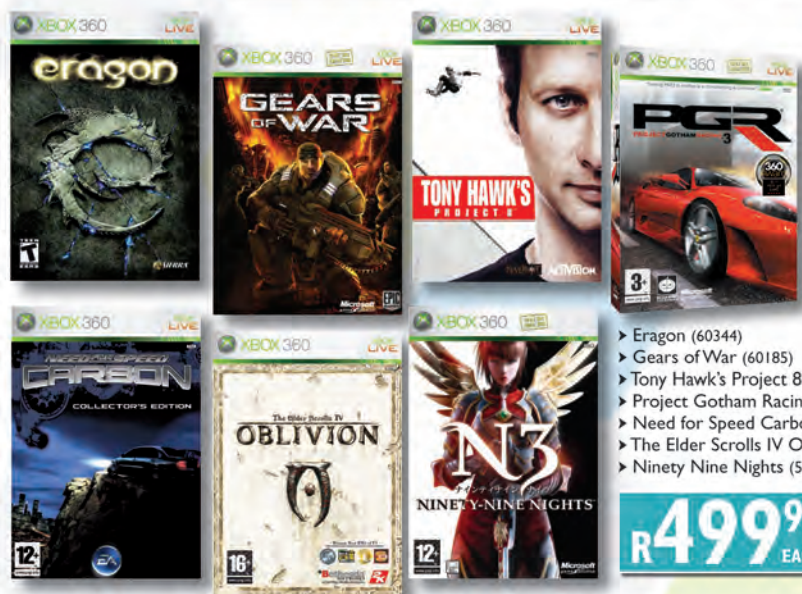
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PREVIEWS

DON'T GET SHOT!

TEN POINTS TO ANYONE who knows which game the title of this paragraph comes from. Here is a hint: it was on a poster during level-load screens. Meanwhile, there are many things for gamers to do in the **Real World** these days. You can queue outside a store for a day or so, in the cold and rain, only to get mugged before the store opens. We think that means you lose, but the game-over screen doesn't appear, so we're not sure. You can get some guns and shoot people, but we don't recommend this - it ruins your already non-existent social life. We've heard there is some sort of mini-game you can play at the mall that involves death-defying leaps across open spaces on your skateboard, but we can't figure out how to avoid the guards, and it's not mentioned in the **Real World** walk-through. The only problem with playing **Real World** is that you don't unlock any Achievements.



FULL AUTO 2: BATTLELINES

DEVELOPER: Deep Fried Entertainment
PUBLISHER: Sega
PLATFORMS: PS3, PSP
GENRE: Action/Racing
RELEASE DATE: 2007

FULL AUTO WAS A blast and one of the better launch titles for the 360. It's an old school 'destroy everything' racer in which players tear across cities, shooting at opponents using heavy weaponry. Sega raised things a notch with *Full Auto*, thanks to the extra power, by creating a lot more in the level subject to the player's destructive urges. Shops, tables, chairs, walls, street poles, trees, barricades, more shops and even the occasional building could be completely obliterated. To top it all, the Rewind feature made it easy to get around problems, such as a wayward mine or going around a corner too fast and compacting your car against a sturdy surface. Sega has since announced a PS3 exclusive, due for release early next year. Now the presence of the game on Sony hardware has been extended with a PSP version. It will boast new cars, new tracks and new options.



DEVELOPER: FromSoftware **PUBLISHER:** Sega **PLATFORMS:** PS3, 360 **GENRE:** Mech **RELEASE DATE:** 2007

THERE ARE THOSE PEOPLE who complain about *Chromehounds*, saying this or that was just terrible, that you couldn't control your mech and that it made you suffer, and bla bla bla. Then there are the Mech nuts who splurged on the Steel Battalion controller and love having every aspect of a fantasy walking tank at their fingertips. What's the point we're trying to make? Well, when it comes to mech games, you definitely can't keep everyone happy. However, you can rely on the stalwarts, and what's more of a stalwart of the genre than the *Armoured Core* series. Okay, you caught us. We're just fluffing 150 words because we're not sure what the fourth game will feature, but it is a mech game heading to the next-gen platforms, which means eye-bleeding graphics, big machines and online support. Yay!

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WHAT WE WANT...



COMMAND & CONQUER 3

Remember that funny bonus music track on the original *C&C*, *I'm a Mechanical Man*? This, along with the High Octane soundtrack, wholly justified Redbook Audio. Did you know there was a parody of the song on the *Warcraft II* expansion, *Beyond the Dark Portal*, titled *I'm a Medieval Man*? It was a funny jab at the *C&C* vs. *Warcraft* culture that was prevalent back in those days. We remember those halcyon summers of our youth. Now if only *C&C 3* would come out already, so we can pretend we're in school listening to Megadeth and playing *Doom*.



WORMS: XBOX LIVE

Many little birds are telling us that there is a version of *Worms World Party* on its way to Xbox Live Arcade, and about time too. Don't get us wrong, *Contra*, *Dig Dug* and all those other 'classics' are fine and dandy, but we're talking *Worms* here. We can't imagine a more perfect union: the multiplayer capabilities of Xbox Live combined with squeaky condom-looking worms firing missiles and sheep at each other. Pure distilled gaming bliss.



CITY LIFE: WORLD EDITION

DEVELOPER: CDV
PUBLISHER: CDV
PLATFORM: PC
GENRE: Management
RELEASE DATE: January 2007

TECHNICALLY, THIS IS STILL *City Life*, the inventive city management game that snuck up on us earlier this year, except that it's a version primarily for the US market. As such, it will include over 100 new buildings, including some iconic structures like the White House, Eiffel Tower and the Kremlin. Since building types play a significant role in making or breaking your city's success, these new additions are likely to give fans lots more to do. To keep the ball rolling, *World Edition* will also include a full editor that will let players manipulate and modify buildings and share them online with other *World Edition* owners. Finally, the new edition also includes support for user MP3s, so you can listen to whatever you please while planning your metropolis. Of course, you could just run Winamp in the background with global hot keys activated, but that's just us.



TITAN QUEST: IMMORTAL THRONE

DEVELOPER: Iron Lore Entertainment
PUBLISHER: THQ
PLATFORM: PC
GENRE: Action
RELEASE DATE: 2007

THQ STRUCK GOLD WITH *Titan Quest*, the latest standard in the action-RPG genre that still holds the *Diablo* banner high. To be honest, we've long given up hope of a third *Diablo* game, instead keeping our eyes on the new blood (not to mention *Hellgate: London*). As far as we're concerned, *Titan Quest* is the new standard. Many gamers will agree, so we can all rejoice that the inevitable has happened and THQ has announced a *Titan Quest* expansion. The plot details are sparse – nonexistent, actually – but the expansion will include a new type of mastery that blends with the current system and brings eight new class types into the game. The single-player campaign will last roughly 12 hours, and fans can expect hundreds of new weapons and monsters, not to mention new locations.



TRACKMANIA UNITED

DEVELOPER: Nadeo
PUBLISHER: Ascaron
PLATFORM: PC
GENRE: Racing
RELEASE DATE: Q1 2007

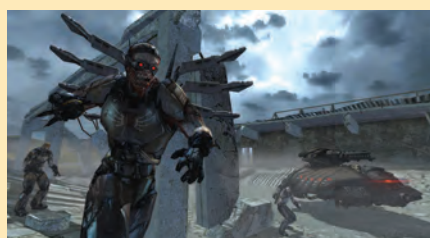
IF YOU DIDN'T KNOW about *Trackmania* before 2006, you certainly did after Nadeo released *Nations*, the free competitive version. The high-speed racer with its roots firmly planted in arcade conventions became incredibly popular, especially in Europe, and it kept the fan base created by *Trackmania* and *Trackmania Sunrise* happy and entertained. Now *United* brings it all together in the most elaborate and comprehensive *Trackmania* game yet. The multiplayer features are more in-depth: rankings, replays, virtual money, invitations... all of these are now part of the system, giving players the ability to manage their online career in the game. *United* will also include all of the play modes introduced in past games, which means there will be hundreds of tracks to complete. If that's not enough, the level editor is ever-present and will boast over 1,000 pieces for track building.



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: TACTICS

DEVELOPER: Kuju
PUBLISHER: Atari
PLATFORM: PSP
GENRE: RPG/Action
RELEASE DATE: Q1 2007

APPEARANTLY THIS WILL BE the first *Dungeons & Dragons* game released on the PSP – curious considering the popularity that *Baldur's Gate* enjoyed on the PS2. Still it's better late than never. *Tactics* will allow players to create a party of six characters who head into the dangerous world of the *Forgotten Realms* and beat up monsters and bandits for experience. The game features the latest character classes, and pedantic players will be happy to hear that the 3.5 rule set will be used to calculate hits, ducks and rolls. Action will be turn-based, although it's not clear if this means it will use the favoured real-time/turn-based pause system seen in a lot of RPGs. Obviously, being a PSP game, wireless co-op games will be supported, as well as a few other multiplayer modes which Atari hasn't elaborated on yet.



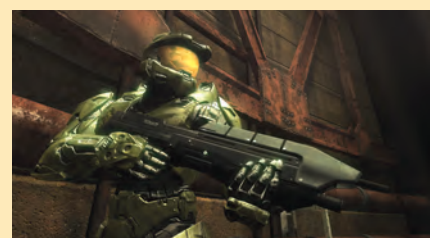
ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS

Do we really need to elaborate on why we want this game? We didn't think so. It's obvious that *Quake* and *Enemy Territory* plus a dash of *Battlefield*-inspired teamwork are going to rock our socks off. John Carmack created a new technology called 'MegaTexture' which has something to do with the pixels on the ground. It seems they use programming voodoo (avert your eyes) to cover the entire terrain in one big texture that snugly adjusts itself to fit. Magic still inhabits the world.



STARCRAFT 2

Oh, come on already Blizzard. We know you want to. You've probably already finished, you're just holding it back to spite all those gamers who said *Starcraft: Ghost* looked stupid. It was stupid, that's why you cancelled it, but that's no reason to be petty. Put down those life-sized Kerrigan dolls and give us more Zerg rushing, more Protoss turtling and more Terran flying buildings.



HALO 3

Raise your hand if you misread Master Chief's name every time, which lead to a wonderful flight of fancy involving Warhogs parked next to the braai, with Master Chef roasting a patty wearing a 'Frag the Cook' apron. Nobody? Okay, it's just us then. Regardless, the Xbox 360 needs *Halo 3* and soon. *Gears of War* rocked our world, but why duck-'n-cover when you can run and gun? Hiding behind low walls is for sissies. Manly-men frag out in the open where they can be sniped by those very people hiding behind low walls.

THE DARKNESS

Developer: Starbreeze Studios

Publisher: 2K Games

Distributor: Megarom

Genre: Action

Platforms: Xbox 360/PS3

Release: Q1 2007



STARBREEZE STUDIOS SURPRISED EVERYONE with *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay*, make no mistake there. Anticipation for the game was lukewarm, but the reception upon release was heartfelt, once people realised that *EFBB* wasn't your average movie tie-in game. The demo scene-gone-game-developer may just repeat its feat once more.

Its next title, *The Darkness*, is based on the comic of the same name. The comic has been around since 1996 and, next to *Witchblade*, represents one of Top Cow's biggest sellers. The game, while set in the universe of *The Darkness*, won't follow the plot laid out in the comic books, but it will be close enough to keep things mostly canonical. You play fearless mafia hit man Jackie Estacado (who, in the comic books, was also a little sex-crazed, though this may not translate into the game). Jackie is a member of the Franchetti crime family, headed by his crazy, vicious cousin, Paulie. On the night of Jackie's 21st birthday, Paulie decides to take on Jackie, but is thwarted by the manifestation of the Darkness in Jackie. The Darkness is a supernatural entity with a malicious will of its own, but considerate enough to endow Jackie with some serious power.

Dubbed a "unique blend of modern crime drama and supernatural horror," *The Darkness* looks a little generic at first, but this notion is swiftly dispelled when you start playing. We got some hands-on time with a recent build of the game, demonstrating two specific levels. The first level was a non-interactive scripted sequence in which you/Jackie are in the back



of a car, driving through an underground tunnel. Suddenly things go balls-up, and there are cop cars flipping overhead, complete with butt-clenching doppler on the sirens. It was at this point where the engine Starbreeze developed for *The Darkness* impressively strutted its stuff. The visuals bear more than a little resemblance to *EFBB*, especially when dealing with the character models, but this is in no way bad. The level geometry looked sparse and blocky, when examined closely. However, in all honesty, when things are exploding around you and someone's head gets taken off by a truck, you don't really care that the car wheels are a little octagonal. The scripted-sequence in the tunnel came across as masterfully crafted, engaging and visceral. We're hoping the game will contain many more, with perhaps a little interactivity during certain parts (shooting out car tyres would have been fun).

The second level we tried gave us access to Jackie's powers, as he cleared out a warehouse and set fire to a pile of money. There is no HUD in *The Darkness*. Starbreeze wanted to heighten the suspense by keeping UI off the screen. Instead, important information is conveyed via cunning visual cues. Jackie's remaining Darkness power, before needing to stand in shadows to recharge, is shown as glowing veins on the two Darkness entities on either side of the screen (when the power is being used). These Darkness entities are two serpent-like creatures that snap at each other and look around when they're bored. Their glowing eyes and the veins running down their sides indicate both the remaining power and which power is selected. One of the two powers we experienced enables you to shoot out a massive black tentacle with

which you fling people, objects and cars with aplomb. The second allowed us to become one of the creatures and slither along the floor, leaving Jackie behind to scout out the level or activate things. In this mode, you can climb up walls and even creep up on enemies, squirm up their legs and then bite off their heads. A third aspect to the Darkness abilities we got to try was the Darklings. Here, when you find a location where a light sparks, you can summon a havoc-inducing Darkling. Each Darkling has its own weapon, and we watched as one used a jackhammer on a bad guy's chest. Gruesome, but entertaining. There is a wide variety of Darklings and they are randomly allocated.

To us, the most striking power was how the game represents things when you're in the dark and using Darkness powers. Everything takes on a shimmering red outline - walls, chairs and even enemies. You can see perfectly in the dark as all shapes are distinct and defined. Visually, the effect is elegant and impressive, not to mention a pleasant departure from how night-vision is usually represented. There are many ways to complete the warehouse level. One may use stealth or all-out gunplay. The guns will automatically move to the edge of a wall if you're peering out from behind cover, allowing you to lean out and shoot, without having to press a button or anything.

While it's still too early to make any kind of informed judgement on *The Darkness*, the hands-on certainly spoke of a game that treats its subject matter with respect, from the hands of capable developers. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Developer

Game Republic

■ Publisher

Sony

■ Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games [011] 445-7960

■ Genre

Action

■ Release date

2007 (Europe)



GENJI: DAYS OF THE BLADE

THIS IS A NEW title that will be launched solely for the PS3 called *Genji: Days of The Blade*, a sequel to the 2005 PS2 title of similar name.

A game based on feudal Japan, *Genji* is an action hack 'n slash that allows players to choose from four different characters, each offering their own unique styles and skills.

The developers have stated that the game will offer a truly next-generation graphical experience with fully 3D animated worlds and characters, as well as all-new control systems. From the few screenshots and trailers that have been in circulation, the environments will be absolutely stunning and it will leave players wanting more. *Genji* will use Sony's new tilt-functioning system where a player can jerk his or her control wildly to perform evasive manoeuvres. This takes the place of using that right analogue stick that we are all used to, although you'll still be able to use the control stick if preferred.

The camera problems that plagued the first game have been remedied by making it fixed, a trick that worked very well for games like *God of War*. There will be four playable characters that the players can choose from, and Sony has said that after playing for a while, you will be able to switch between the four characters at any time, adding flavour to the storyline. One of the four characters will be Busson,

the end boss of the original title, who was supposedly dead but will come back with mere scars as a reminder.

In terms of playability, Sony has revealed that *Genji: Days of The Blade* will be at least double the length of the previous title. Players should be happy to play a longer and more involved storyline, and there will be many new and challenging puzzles and mysteries to solve. One thing we are not sure of is who the enemies will be, but let us hope we do not have to face that giant enemy crab again. Players will definitely not be disappointed with the amount as there are new enemies constantly attacking.

Genji: Days of The Blade hopes to be an impressive entry to the genre, not to mention to establish hack 'n slash credentials for the PS3 at an early stage. **NAG**



Paris called her new fashion line
Kung-Fu Chic

BEYOND
AZEROTH...

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then unlock a world
of new possibilities.

SEIZE the dark frontier
astride winged mounts
you control.

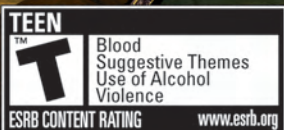
MASTER the
mystical energies
of the blood
elves.

A NEW WORLD AWAITS

UNLEASH
the light-given
power of
the draenei.



JANUARY 2007



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QUAKE WARS

Developer: Splash Damage/id Software **Publisher:** Activision **Distributor:** Megarom [011] 234-2680 **Genre:** Action **Platform:** PC **Release:** Q2 2007

IN THE MARCH 2006 issue of NAG, we ran a detailed and comprehensive feature on the upcoming *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*. Since then, almost ten months have passed, and it seems appropriate to provide an update on the *Quake*-gone-*Battlefield*.

ET:QW is being developed by Splash Damage, who was responsible for the stand-alone *Enemy Territory* free multiplayer game (which was originally planned as a commercial expansion pack to *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*).

Splash Damage is working closely with id software on *ET:QW*, fending off reports that id is just farming out its intellectual property (although id and Raven made similar claims for the lackluster *Quake 4*). So far, the results speak for themselves and only contribute to the, already bolstered, anticipation surrounding the title.

The summary view of *ET:QW* is still the same as back in March: a team-based multiplayer-only game, involving Humans vs. Strogg, enacting the Strogg Invasion battles on Earth. This leads

to the start of *Quake II*. Both sides have five classes, each class critical on the whole and very functional on the individual level. Depending on the class chosen, players will be able to build anti-human, anti-vehicle, and even anti-air turrets, anywhere within their own base zone, which adds a dab of real-time strategy into the mix. Along the same lines of tactical application, a team can set up mini-bases with satellite towers and mobile outposts to create a forward assault base (literally on the enemy doorstep, if so desired). Fire team leaders can assign their squads mini-objectives and on-the-fly waypoints for some rather demanding teamwork on the battlefield.

The battles play out on huge asymmetrical, objective-driven maps full of vehicles. This adopts a more *Wolfenstein: ET* approach than the mostly symmetrical *Battlefield* zone-capture. One side usually has to liberate areas split into distinct territories, starting on one side and attempting to push the frontline past a sequence of objectives. There won't be a Commander class as found in *Battlefield 2*. It seems that idea was dumped more than two years ago, according to lead game designer Paul Wedgewood. "Where it comes to things like deployables, we place the responsibility for a deployable that a character class is going to use with that character class," he says, "so if you're a field-ops guy and you want an artillery gun, you're the guy who deploys the artillery gun, you're the guy who gets told what its status is, and you're the guy who uses it."

There won't be any persistent ranks (although there are ranks in the game that unlock better weapons as you progress through the battle, which disappear if the server is restarted), but the team is apparently toying with bringing in some persistence. There will be no single-player to *Quake Wars*, but then again, does it really need it? **NAG**



Kameo

Elements of Power

punch-throwing.

boulder-heaving.

ice-spear-hurling.

fire-spewing warrior.

I'm an

Mess with me,
you mess with all of me.

You are Kameo. Morph into 10 different formidable elemental warriors at will. Explore enchanted lands. Then crush, clobber, char, freeze, elude, ensnare, and destroy the evil boss Thorn and his minions. Only you have the power to restore peace to the kingdom. Make that, several powers... xbox.com



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Jump in.



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Developer

Jupiter Corporation

■ Publisher

Buena Vista Games

■ Distributor

TBA

■ Genre

RPG/Battle

■ Release Date

TBA

SPECTROBES

THE EVIL KRAWL FORCES threaten to destroy the galaxy, and only you (along with an extinct collection of creatures called Spectrobes) can stop them. That's the basic plot of *Spectrobes*, an upcoming title from developer Jupiter (who worked directly with Square Enix and Buena Vista on *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories*).

As an original concept, *Spectrobes* is a bit of *Pokémon*, combined with some Nintendo DS mechanics and a lot of battling. The Spectrobes are extinct creatures that once thrived, and are the convenient natural enemy of the invading Krawl. You dig around to find fossils of the creatures and revive them for battle. The word 'slaughter' is actually thrown around in various press releases, which seems slightly out of place for this supposed 'family' game. A little gore never hurt anyone, though.

Firstly, you have to locate the Spectrobes. The exploration part of the game involves wandering around the futuristic environments, represented via a 3D engine that uses both screens and a very *Animal Crossing*-like 'rolling log' effect that enables players to see a good distance. The player seeks out fossils using a radar ping, which leads to excavation.

Excavating fossils appears to be a very tactile experience. You tap the screen to dig and shatter layers of soil and reach the buried fossil. In an almost *Trauma Centre*-inspired manner, you use the equipment at your disposal to bring the fossil to the surface through a variety of strategies. You can use brute force and drill the fossil out, but that may cause damage. Sandblasting and acid-washing may work, but it takes a long time. Blowing into the microphone dislodges dust clinging to the fossils.

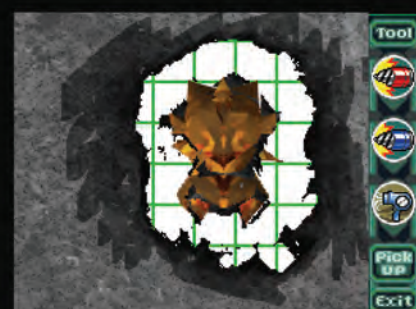
Once you uncover the fossil, you take it back to the lab to revive it. When it's alive and kicking, some food raises the Spectrobe and increases its abilities. The Spectrobes also gain experience and abilities from continued battle. Certain Spectrobes train and evolve better in specific environments, although Jupiter hasn't yet elaborated on this feature.

The battle system is a real-time affair. Players enter battle by wandering into specific icons. Depending on which two Spectrobes you take in with you, you can pull off special combination attacks with a fair amount of grace.



Jupiter is promising more than fifty unique Spectrobes to uncover, collect and battle. Each Spectrobe can also be customised with some visual aesthetics. To top it off, wireless multiplayer comes in with Spectrobe trading with other players, as well as the ability to download exclusive collectables. You'll also be able to battle against friends in one-on-one wireless tournaments. **NAG**

Gotta defile em' all





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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Developer

EA

■ Publisher

EA

■ Distributor

EA South Africa [011] 516-8300

■ Genre

Combat

■ Release Date

TBA

No BBQ is really complete
without a fist fight



DEF JAM: ICON

MIXING RAPPERS AND FIGHTING can be very enjoyable, although a bit 'Jerry Springer' at times, but that is what EA's *Def Jam* series has always offered, quite successfully. A player begins by creating his or her own character or choosing an existing one, and takes on some of *Def Jam*'s notorious icons such as Ludacris or Big Boi. Although not much has been released about whom the all-star cast will be, it is sure to be big. This game will be the first in the series to take a jab, excuse the pun, at the next-gen market on both Xbox 360 and PS3, and so far it has excellent potential to join the ranks of some of the other fighting greats.

Def Jam: Icon features all-new control systems, which make use of almost every available option (as well as a new sound system) in which players get to beat the stuffing out



of their fellow man to the rhythm of the game's or even their own soundtrack. Choose music to suit your fighting needs, whether it's some sugar pop lullaby by the Spice Girls, the stylings of Greenday, or even Pink Floyd; whatever gets you up and going in the morning.

This is set to be a spectacular title for almost everyone, one well worth the wait and the money. Even those who might despise rap, because, with the new sound system, the soundtrack can be set to anything of your choosing. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Developer

Webzen

■ Publisher

Webzen

■ Distributor

TBA

■ Genre

Action MMO

■ Release Date

2007

HUXLEY

ASK ANY GAMER WHAT the future holds, and you're likely to get an answer that includes some form of post-apocalyptic war, monsters, and really big guns. South Korean developer Webzen's prognosis is reassuringly (to any gamer, at least) in line with this. The story behind *Huxley*, an MMOFPSRPG (wrap your tongue around that), is that the Earth gets pummeled by enormous chunks of nasty extraterrestrial stuff called Nuclearites. This triggers earthquakes, tidal waves, climate changes and all manner of cataclysmic devastation. Those wretched souls, unlucky enough to be caught in the subsequent fallout, start to exhibit weird mutations, and before you can cry 'Sub-species lynch mob!', the flak grenades are flying.

There are two confirmed playable factions: Sapiens (vanilla humans), and Alternatives (muties). Of course, temptation and clandestine deviance are prevalent and have given rise to a third faction, the Hybrids. While Webzen is remaining resolutely coy about the possibility of these guys being a playable faction, we do know that they're divided into four sub-categories, according to their level of intrinsic humanity: alpha (mostly human), beta, gamma, and epsilon (the creature from the *Black Lagoon*).

The traditional MMORPG model is fairly well-developed, and the game world includes several cities where players interact with one another as well as NPCs. They can haggle for weapons and armour, and even buy property. Characters level up, unlocking new skills such as the ability to equip better gear. Advancing in rank enables players to form squads, give orders, and generally be the tactical big cheese.

Out of town, it's an FPS battleground. The game runs on the Unreal Engine 3, packing in Ageia's Physics API for good measure.



Expect to see anything up to 200 players, gleefully shooting each other's faces, in a single scenario, all in glorious HDR lighting. It looks gorgeous, it sounds awesome and we're excited. **NAG**



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C&C ON CONSOLE?! WTF?!!!!

Developer: EA Games

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Distributor: EA South Africa

Genre: Strategy

Platform: PC, Xbox 360

Release: TBA 2007

It's been a while, hasn't it? Where have you been, *Command & Conquer*? Sure, you entertained us with *Generals*, but let's face it, that was just filler to tide us over. *The First Decade* was nostalgic, and we appreciate it. However, now it's time to bring out the big guns and remind us why you were (and may be again) a pillar of the RTS genre. A big surprise to everyone was the announcement that *Command & Conquer 3* would also be appearing on the Xbox 360. We caught up with Mike Glosecki, Senior Producer on C&C 3, and asked him a few questions about the 360 version.

COMMAND + CONQUER TIBERIUM WARS

As this is the third game in the franchise, how will you be introducing Xbox 360 gamers to the *Command & Conquer* universe?

We will be introducing the C&C universe in multiple ways, including high-end cinematics that blend live action and CG. Story is deeply integrated into the single-player campaign, from the theatre of war maps to the mission objectives. Our tutorial will not only introduce the player to the game mechanics and controls, but will also introduce the player to GDI, by making them a recruit at one of their boot camps. We give you touch stones and a way to connect with our story, and then we draw you into the universe.

What lessons did you learn about converting real-time strategy games to play on the 360 from *Battle for Middle-earth II*?

For the most part, I think we succeeded in making a great set of controls for *The Battle for Middle-earth II* for the Xbox 360 (*BFME II* 360), but we will definitely be refining and improving the controls specifically for C&C 3 Xbox 360, based on player and community feedback we received. One major area of focus for us will be to examine ways to streamline and speed up the responsiveness of our controls, as well as build on the foundation that we had in *BFME II* 360.

Will there be any exclusive content or features for the 360 version?

Absolutely. Multiplayer was a huge success for us with *BFME II* 360, since we had a much higher percentage of the players go online and play *BFME II* 360 than the PC version. This inspired us to add some new game modes to multiplayer: Conquer, Capture the Flag, and Siege. In Conquer mode, the players build up their armies to a set point limit before the game starts. They then fight their opponents without gathering resources or building new units during the game. Capture the flag features a flag hidden in the middle of the level, and each team that returns the flag to their base gets a point, with the winner being the first person to five points. Siege is basically a 'turtling' mode where



a wall is put up between the players, which keeps them from attacking each other for the first five minutes of gameplay. All of these modes will also carry over to single-player skirmish play against the AI.

Are there any plans for downloadable content via Xbox Live, such as new maps, missions, or units?

Yes, we are planning on offering downloadable maps, in a similar fashion to the maps that we offered on *BFME II* 360. We will also be offering themes and gamer pics, in addition to other downloadable content for Xbox Live.

Will *C&C 3* take advantage of the new Live Anywhere features, such as multiplayer compatibility with the Windows Vista version?

Live Anywhere is a great feature that we are very excited about and we are looking into doing this for future console RTS games. Unfortunately, we will not be able to include the feature in *C&C 3* Xbox 360.

If Microsoft were to release a mouse and keyboard for the 360, would *C&C 3* support it?

Our game certainly could support a mouse and keyboard, but I don't think it's the right path for *C&C 3* Xbox 360. Our game is meant to be played in your living room, and I just don't see the keyboard as part of the experience. Also, our team's development philosophy is that the console controls are easier to pick up and learn for novice gamers, and that an experienced user with the console controls can play as well as, or better than, an experienced RTS player using a keyboard. We also see console players doing things with the controls that you do not see much of on the PC. For example, how often do you see players rotating the camera on a PC RTS? *BFME II* 360 console players do it all the time because it's so easy. You just move the right analogue stick and you've got the camera rotating. I honestly think that the *C&C 3* 360 controls are awesome and am looking forward to the day when we can play a console RTS vs. a PC RTS. I think we will surprise everyone when the console players start beating the PC players. **NAG**

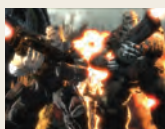


REVIEWS

WEB SCORES

GEARS OF WAR [360]

NAG [100]	94
Metacritic [100]	94
Gamerankings [100]	95



CALL OF DUTY 3 [360]

NAG [100]	70
Metacritic [100]	82
Gamerankings [100]	84



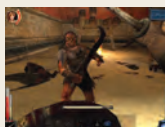
SAM & MAX EPISODE 1: CULTURE SHOCK [PC]

NAG [100]	90
Metacritic [100]	81
Gamerankings [100]	83



DARK MESSIAH OF MIGHT & MAGIC [PC]

NAG [100]	69
Metacritic [100]	74
Gamerankings [100]	75



TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND [360]

NAG [100]	65
Metacritic [100]	75
Gamerankings [100]	75



SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT [360]

NAG [100]	91
Metacritic [100]	86
Gamerankings [100]	85



SW: FORCES OF CORRUPTION [PC]

NAG [100]	54
Metacritic [100]	77
Gamerankings [100]	78



NEED FOR SPEED: CARBON [PC]

NAG [100]	78
Metacritic [100]	79
Gamerankings [100]	78



The ratings in this section, apart from the NAG ratings, are not the opinion of NAG Magazine. Duh. All scores were correct at time of printing.

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86	Open Season	[MOB]
86	Saints Row	[MOB]
86	Splinter Cell: Double Agent	[MOB]

84



74

76

70



WHAT WE'RE PLAYING...



GEARS OF WAR [360]

It's pretty to look at, and pretty to hold. It even plays pretty. Overall, *Gears of War* is a pretty game. If you're too manly to accept the use of the word 'pretty', replace all instances of pretty with 'awesome' and you should be okay. The multiplayer is surprisingly addictive, despite the occasional bug. Chain-sawing someone in half online is more satisfying than it probably should be.



TONY HAWK'S PROJECT 8 [360]

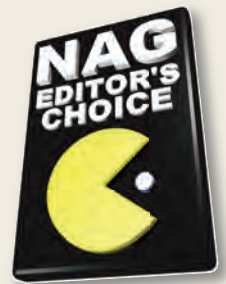
A refreshing back-to-basics for the series and it works. The pure, unadulterated skateboarding pleasure comes across loud and clear. Slow-mo was made for this game, giving you some breathing room to plan your runs and retain your balance while grinding or manuailling. The story is told in two sentences by Tony Hawk's digital self. After that it's all about you, your board and an entire city to skate around. Rad.



AWARDS

EDITOR'S CHOICE

This prestigious award gets bestowed upon games that really catch NAG's collective eye. The Editor's Choice award is for games that have some indefinable trait that just make them stand head and shoulders above the rest, peering about nervously. Usually, games that are fun, visually stunning and which leave a lasting impression are honoured with the coveted Editor's Choice. It's almost similar to knighthood, but not as humiliating!



CLASSIC AWARD

Any game that scores above 85% gets the much-envied Classic Award in honour of its achievement. Above 85% represents a game that has managed to set itself apart from the crowd of mediocrity – a game worthy of some attention. Games awarded the Classic Award are games you can trust.



SCORING

NAG is different, NAG is special. We score games on the 50% principle, meaning that we regard 50% as 'average'. It's neither here, nor there. 50% is the perfect middle ground. A game that scores 50% is a game that does nothing wrong, but nothing right either. If a game won't install properly, naturally it scores less than 50%. If a game brings something new to the table, or does what it does well, it'll go up from the 50% average. 60% is above average, a game that might appeal to some. 70% is a game that's pushing its own limits slightly, one that's perhaps putting a new spin on common ideas. 80% represents a game with a difference, one of quality and as few rough edges as possible. 90% is outstanding, a game that has separated itself from the horde to do its own thing, and does it well. No game will ever achieve 100%, because if a game ever did, we'd be out of jobs. Nobody would play anything else anyway.



STARFOX COMMAND [DS]

A surprise hit for the DS, *StarFox Command* is an odd mishmash of genres and legacy ideas from the incomplete *StarFox 2* ROM for the SNES, which floats around the Internet. You draw paths for your fighters on the map, scratch away fog-of-war and then engage in the 'stacked' battle scenarios that occur as you end your turn. It's not quite *StarFox* 'on rails' anymore, but the full 3D dog-fighting works.



NEED FOR SPEED: CARBON [PC]

EA seems rather content to stick to the middle of the road on this one. *Carbon* doesn't really add anything new to the *Most Wanted* formula, except more levels of customisation. Spoilers, rims, ridges and bonnets can be tweaked, twisted and adjusted, like a nubile piece of aluminium foil. That sounded hot, almost. However, it is surprising that *Carbon* is being enjoyed by the female NAG staff.



FINAL FANTASY XII [PS2]

Square dates back to the mid 1980s, and started off with a few simple RPGs for the Nintendo Famicom Disk System. Around 1987, Square was close to bankruptcy. Around the same time, Square designer Hironobu Sakaguchi was working on an ambitious new RPG for the cartridge-based Famicom, inspired by *Dragon Quest*. Sakaguchi was planning to retire after completing his game, so he named it *Final Fantasy*. Boy, was he wrong.



GEARS OF WAR

IT TRULY IS A *Mad World* (such a hip reference to the awesome *Gears of War* cinema trailer) we gamers live in. When a much-hyped game such as *Gears of War* actually delivers, it rocks the very foundation of your hyperbolic cynicism. Hopes were impossibly high and yet, Epic somehow managed with all its might to just make it, slapping the hopes with an eager high-five and an unabashed butt-wiggle.

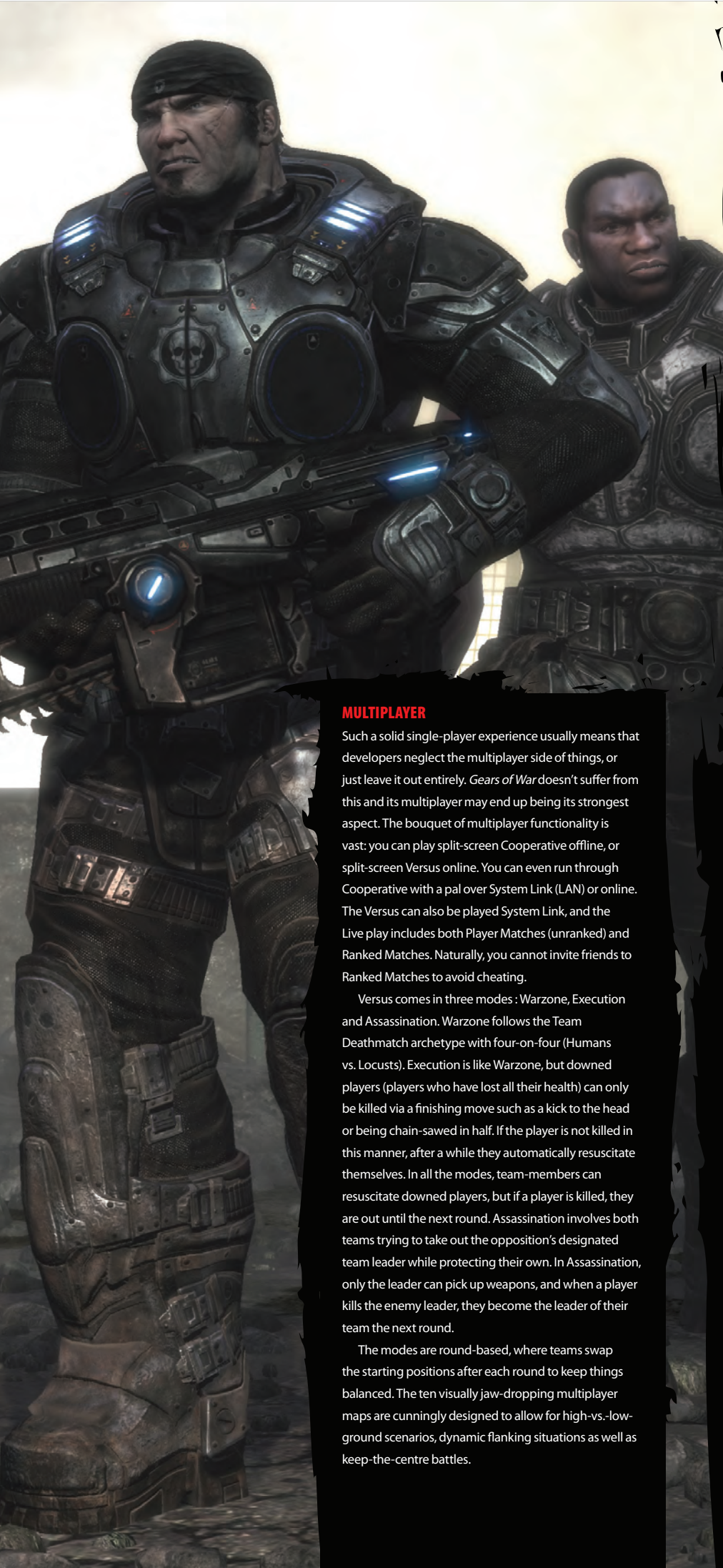
Let us be frank and blatant here for a minute. If you own an Xbox 360 and you're not a stout pacifist who refuses to support the violence-machine, then go and buy *GOW* right now. There are many things that define a must-have title: bragging rights, system-justifying visuals, as well as solid gameplay and deep multiplayer. Pick one, and that's a good enough reason to own *GOW*. However, by no means is it the perfect game and *GOW* does have its problems and niggles. Your squad-mates are incredibly retarded, the difficulty on any level other than Casual is thumb-blisteringly insane, the multiplayer has a few collision problems, and the single-player feels just too damn short. In a few places, it feels like the plot could do with just one little cut-scene for elaboration, perhaps even a flashback. The feeling of the single-player being short is due to the 'please-don't-let-this-end' phenomenon that often plagues good games, although the more difficult settings do substantially lengthen the game by adding enemies everywhere. Kleptomaniacs will enjoy added longevity, thanks to 30 COG-tags scattered around, ripe for collection.

GOW is an action title first, and a horror second, the latter in the form of some scary bits involving closets and dead people. There's nothing to make you cling to your teddy, but enough to get the blood pumping and set the ambience. The mood is very bleak, wholeheartedly supported by the desolate and

desperate environments where the creepy Locusts attempt to eat you (and your squad-mate Dom). *GOW* runs on some serious Unreal Engine 3 power, gladly flaunting it. Thankfully there are some brains behind the beauty, and the refined controls and sleek cover system allow for some genuinely epic firefights. Flimsy cover deteriorates, Locusts will attempt to flank, and the weapons feel/sound right. The sheer primal joy one gets from chain-sawing an enemy (or friend in multiplayer) into two travel-sized parts is dubiously gratifying. Having an AI (or human in Cooperative) buddy with you all the way (except when you get purposefully separated) works, with the additional firepower and cover-fire a boon.

Lead bad-ass Marcus Fenix is voiced by John Di Maggio, well known for being the voice of Bender in *Futurama*. His voice acting laurels include *Final Fantasy XII*, *Kingdom Hearts II* and even *The Animatrix*. That's a reasonable amount of street-cred in terms of voicing the lead character. Voice acting may not be the most important part of a game, but when it sucks, you really notice it. But in *GOW* you note it for all of the right reasons.

In terms of innovation, *GOW* has none and that's just fine. What it does have is polish, class and a bucket-load of Achievements. *Gears of War* may not be doing anything new, but what it does do, it does damn well, and that counts just as much as innovation. **NAG**



MULTIPLAYER

Such a solid single-player experience usually means that developers neglect the multiplayer side of things, or just leave it out entirely. *Gears of War* doesn't suffer from this and its multiplayer may end up being its strongest aspect. The bouquet of multiplayer functionality is vast: you can play split-screen Cooperative offline, or split-screen Versus online. You can even run through Cooperative with a pal over System Link (LAN) or online. The Versus can also be played System Link, and the Live play includes both Player Matches (unranked) and Ranked Matches. Naturally, you cannot invite friends to Ranked Matches to avoid cheating.

Versus comes in three modes: Warzone, Execution and Assassination. Warzone follows the Team Deathmatch archetype with four-on-four (Humans vs. Locusts). Execution is like Warzone, but downed players (players who have lost all their health) can only be killed via a finishing move such as a kick to the head or being chain-sawed in half. If the player is not killed in this manner, after a while they automatically resuscitate themselves. In all the modes, team-members can resuscitate downed players, but if a player is killed, they are out until the next round. Assassination involves both teams trying to take out the opposition's designated team leader while protecting their own. In Assassination, only the leader can pick up weapons, and when a player kills the enemy leader, they become the leader of their team the next round.

The modes are round-based, where teams swap the starting positions after each round to keep things balanced. The ten visually jaw-dropping multiplayer maps are cunningly designed to allow for high-vs.-low-ground scenarios, dynamic flanking situations as well as keep-the-centre battles.

DUCK & COVER

The offensive cover system in *Gears of War* is remarkably useful and polished, letting you Swat-roll from cover to cover, leap over barricades and blind-fire your way around corners. Epic didn't invent the idea though, they just perfected it.

The first real attempt at a proper offensive cover system came in Namco's *kill.switch* (2003), where players could engage the enemy from behind cover with little risk to themselves. You could blind-fire around corners without being shot, which was seen as a major feature at the time. Sadly, *kill.switch* didn't implement the idea well and it was more frustrating than useful.



Rogue Trooper (2006) refined the offensive cover idea by letting players conform to objects and terrain and then blind-fire or aim fire from protected positions. You could run, leap and dive out from behind cover or into cover, although the number of key/button presses required for the athletic stunts was overbearing.

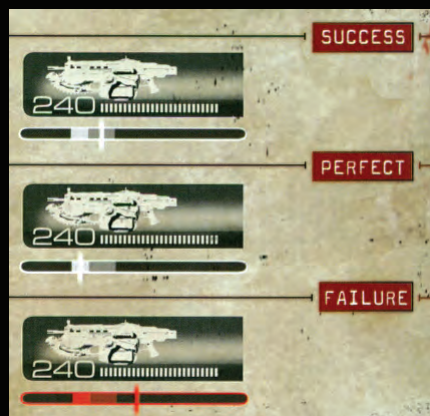


In *Gears of War* the entire offensive cover system has been reduced to a single button press. Holding down 'A' lets you run, and if you get close to cover the character will automatically slide in and take cover. From there, it's all contextual. Tapping 'A' while behind low cover will vault you over, while holding right or left near the edges allows you to dive out or Swat-roll to the nearest cover. Holding the analogue at an angle enables you to roll out running, as long as you're holding down 'A'.



ACTIVE RELOAD

A rather unique element to *Gears of War*, the Active Reload entails hitting the right bumper at just the right moment to quickly reload the weapon. If timed perfectly, the portion of ammo reloaded in the next clip gains a damage boost, and the gun reloads faster. If badly timed, the gun will jam and Marcus will curse appropriately as the reload takes longer. If you don't use Active Reload, you'll reload at average speed. Using Active Reload effectively can be a real bonus, especially in multiplayer.



LIMITED COLLECTOR'S EDITION

The *Gears of War* Limited Collector's Edition was released along with the standard edition. It includes a small hardcover art book titled *Destroyed Beauty*, a bonus DVD with the MTV Special *The Race to E3*, as well as an hour long 'Making of' documentary. The entire bundle is packaged in a tin case, and the art book contains beautiful concept drawings and final artworks from the game.



WHAT TO EXPECT FROM UNREAL ENGINE 3

While definitely the posterchild for the Unreal Engine 3, *Gears of War* is just one of the many titles that use Epic's next-generation engine.

- BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY
- MASS EFFECT
- TOO HUMAN
- UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007
- LINEAGE 3
- STRANGLEHOLD





VITAL INFO

Platform

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R299.00

Developer

Epic Games

Publisher

Microsoft

Supplier

MDigital [011] 723-1967

Genre

Action/Horror

Age Restriction

18+

Specifications

Online: Yes

Controllers: 1-2

Players: 1-2

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BOTTOM LINE

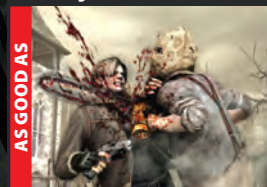
Apparently Microsoft is considering Marcus Fenix as a replacement for Master Chief as the new poster boy for the Xbox.

94/100

Ken's Labyrinth



Owning a Chainsaw



CALL OF DUTY 3

IF WE HAD TO choose one word to describe the *Call of Duty* series, it would be 'cinematic'. *Medal of Honor* stuck to the conventions of a shooter while *Brothers in Arms* explored the tactical side more, so that left *COD* comfortably in a sub-genre that it created for itself. However, it also means that the series develops a formula, which is inevitable for popular games. Eventually it can drag a series down, because most attempts at reinvention are seen as gimmicks (and sometimes they are), and the fans become less admiring and more interested in other offerings. It's sad. When it happens at a series' high point, it's tragic.

While there are plenty of examples of secondary developers doing a series justice when taking over the reigns (the latest being Nival's revival of *Heroes of Might & Magic* and the interesting back-and-forth of *Ghost Recon* and *Rainbow 6* between Red Storm and Ubisoft Montreal), there is a very good chance that the general vision and vibrancy of the series is lost. Basically every developer talks about 'catering for the fans' of the franchise it just inherited, sometimes to the detriment of those fans. Features are seen as the hallmarks of the game and become the *de facto* areas of improvement, rather than concentrating on how the whole package comes together. There is also an attempt to enhance the overall experience of the last popular game. 'More of the same', if you will.

There's nothing wrong with that. You could argue that *Call of Duty 2* was really just more of *Call of Duty*, but with a few nips and tucks. Yet, fans can easily isolate changes to the game at large. The best example is the simple addition of smoke grenades. These changed the game dynamic, much like *Brothers in Arms* changed when *Earned in Blood* introduced ammo dumps disguised as squad mates. But *COD2* also placed a heavy emphasis of the game's cinematic nature. Visually it was a powerful, breathtaking experience with finely crafted scripting and very good pacing. This is perhaps where *Call of Duty 3* starts to go wrong.

To the casual observer *Call of Duty 3* could easily



be mistaken for *Call of Duty 2*. Not that it is. Visually the game takes a few big leaps forward, exploiting the proprietary 360 platform to its benefit. Rain glistens on maps, enemies emerge by the dozens, guns sound and look perfect, buildings explode and grenades revel in cosmetic shrapnel, which even the most obsessed *F.E.A.R.* player couldn't fantasise about. Well, perhaps not that much, but it certainly is a really pretty game with lots going on. Grass flattens and scorches, soft cover features everywhere and the whole game exudes a feeling of constant war and destruction - like *COD2*, just more so. The scripting and visual queues are equally slick and on time. Even the battle actions, where you fight off an attacking Nazi in an interactive sequence, are quite nifty. Nevertheless, it's still *COD2*. There are a few small additions, such as the ability to delay a grenade throw for a quicker bang or the ability to throw back an enemy grenade that landed between your feet (we still would like to see a distance indicator on the grenade-near-your-ass warning).

In reality, the biggest change is the move to a chronological storyline. Instead of playing each nation's campaign, the missions takes place in one long storyline, jumping between the four characters you'll play during the game. The script here is less *Band of Brothers* and more *A Bridge Too Far*, sometimes just plain *Dirty Dozen*. Alas, the voice actors would work better in 'Allo, 'Allo. To be frank, *COD* doesn't need these deep stories - the hook has always been the intensity of the campaign and the various events in a mission. It's rare that you really remember *COD* characters.

There's nothing technically wrong with *Call of Duty 3*. Treyarch is a competent developer and knows how to work with the series. However, the game lacks something, making it a rather unremarkable entry into the series. The graphical updates and new features are nice, but expected. It comes across as an enhanced *COD2*. This is a pity considering how many more innovative things the series can introduce. Anyone who hasn't played a *COD* game in a while should try it out, but fans will feel shortchanged. **NAG**



CALL OF DUTY 3 - PLAYSTATION 2

You could argue that what has kept the 360 version back was the need to scale the game to a PlayStation 2 version. You'd be right, of course, since this is often seen with ports of any kind. The PS2 version is not nearly as visceral and exciting as the 360 game, because a lot of effects such as lighting, foliage, dust and rubble are not there or are toned down to their bare minimum. It's like playing a game at minimum spec - essentially the same, but you're missing out on the magic. Unfortunately, it is also burdened by a choppy framerate, something that shouldn't be a problem in an FPS. It's not unplayable, but it's not that entertaining either, especially with most of the cinematic effects disabled.

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R280 PS2, R385 Xbox 360

Developer

Treyarch

Publisher

Activision

Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

16+

Specifications

Players: 1-4

Controllers: 1-4

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BOTTOM LINE

Technically great, but as a *COD* game it doesn't deliver the goods.

70/100

Call of Duty



Call of Duty 2



SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT

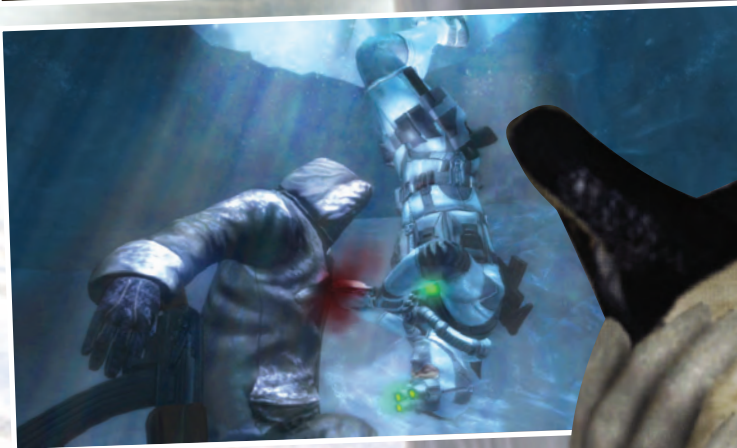
S*P splinter cell: double agent* is the fourth game in the *Splinter Cell* series, a series that anyone who plays games would know whether they enjoy it or not. The stealth shooter camp can be split into two these days, composed of *Splinter Cell* and *Metal Gear Solid* players. It's a silly practice, because neither game bears much resemblance to the other. To veterans of the series, 'Sam Fisher's New Adventure' (as the title screen calls it) is exactly what can be expected from the game. It's Sam Fisher. He can do more things. The graphics are even prettier. As far as *Splinter Cell* games go, the bulk of *Double Agent* is as tense and delightful as a *Splinter Cell* game can get.

The game follows Sam Fisher as an NSA spy, working as a double agent for a terrorist group 'John Brown's Army' (the JBA). During the game you're provided with two trust bars, one for the NSA and one for the JBA, and a list of mission objectives. Completing some will raise one organisation's trust, and completing others will lower it. Allowing either of the bars to empty will end the mission. Trust is also influenced by various incidental actions, such as killing innocent civilians and being caught in a security area. Although it sounds confusing, the trust system adds a much-needed narrative to the story, in terms of the choices that are available. Anyone who played the previous games will remember that there was a somewhat arbitrary alert counter which would end the mission if you were spotted too often. Thus, playing *Double Agent* will probably see one appreciate the open-ended approach the new trust system grants them.

Along with this trust system is a somewhat proprietary unlock system. Your character has to unlock new equipment by completing special mission objectives. A lot of the old equipment reappears, such as the sticky cameras, sticky shockers, and the SC20k assault rifle's shotgun attachment. In contrast with *Chaos Theory*, you no longer select an equipment load before a mission, which means you always have all your equipment. Among the new equipment is the auto-lock pick - certainly handy, but it can't be turned off. It's not that big a problem unless, like us, you find that the lock picking contributed to the tenseness of the game, particularly while fumbling to get a door open before a guard comes around a corner and sees you.

The storyline weaves through a selection of interesting locations that have become a trademark of the series, including a supertanker stuck in ice flows in the Sea of Okhotsk and the Jin Mao Building in Shanghai. The new story even runs through a few daytime missions, where Sam favours a pair of aviator sunglasses over his night-vision goggles. Red Storm has also taken the effort to give each mission its own collection of memorable set-pieces, such as a playable skydiving sequence at the beginning of the supertanker mission.

Double Agent will take at least a few days to finish, and the multiple story and level paths extend the longevity substantially. Player choices do, in fact, make relevant changes to the storyline, and there are entire sections that can be reached only by following a certain course. Add to this a multiplayer mode with a healthy chunk of maps, persistent unlocks and the promise of downloadable content, and you're left with a next-gen title that no sneak-'em-up fan should neglect playing. **NAG**

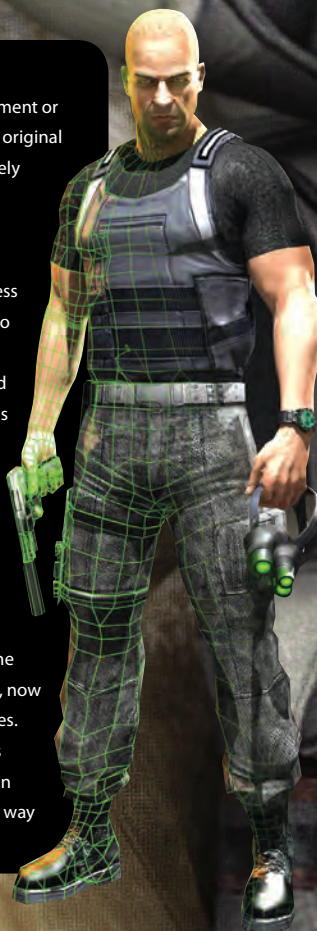


On the North Pole muggings are sophisticated



MULTIPLAYER

The multiplayer section could be considered a huge improvement or a let-down, depending on how much of a fan you were of the original multiplayer. *Double Agent's* online section is almost completely unrelated to previous implementations, at least for the Xbox 360 and PC versions. The spies are far more mobile and more aggressive, while the mercenaries have been relieved of their traps and intel devices. The mercenaries' game has become less about planning and teamwork, and more about responding to threats. Similarly, the spies' game has departed from hiding and sneaking, to being about moving and striking quickly and decisively. *Chaos Theory's* phenomenal cooperative mode has also been dropped in favour of what is essentially a botmatch against AI-controlled mercenaries. Although it bears little resemblance to the far slower-paced and arguably more tactical multiplayer present in *Pandora Tomorrow* and *Chaos Theory*, the new multiplayer is interesting and enjoyable in its own right. Along with their increased movement speed, spies now have contextual escape moves that allow them to perform running dives through windows and into vents. The mercenaries, castrated of their sensor networks and tripwires, now have a little beeping sensor that assists them in detecting spies. Although different to both the single-player and the previous multiplayer iterations of the game, the online section has been fairly well-received by the Live community, and remains a fun way to spend a lunch break.



VITAL INFO

Platforms

Reviewed on Xbox 360

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R555

Developer

Ubisoft Montreal

Publisher

Ubisoft

Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

Genre

Stealth

Age Restriction

18+

Specifications

Players: 1-2

Online: Yes

Controllers: 1-2

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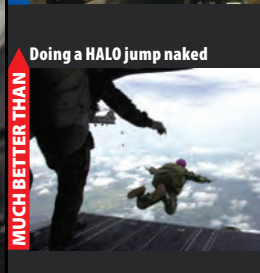
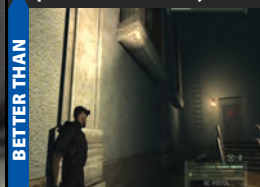
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BOTTOM LINE

For a first next-gen title from Red Storm, *Splinter Cell* makes quite a few changes to the *Splinter Cell* formula. While some purists may find the new multiplayer unpalatable, the new single-player campaign will almost certainly provide entertainment for at least two play-throughs.

91/100

Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory



Doing a HALO jump naked

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R299

Developer

Arkane Studios

Publisher

Ubisoft

Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

Genre

Action/RPG

Age Restriction

18+

Specifications

CPU: 3GHz Pentium 4

Video: 128MB graphics card

RAM: 512MB

HDD: 7GB

CD/DVD: 4x DVD-ROM

Players: Up to 32 in multiplayer

Internet: Not required

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DARK MESSIAH OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

THERE EXISTS A SINGLE game pedigree behind *Dark Messiah*, since developer Arkane Studios proved its worth with the timeless *Arx Fatalis*. Originally planned to be *Ultima Underworld III* (but Arkane got cockblocked and couldn't get the official license), *Arx Fatalis* remains a rough but inspired game with interesting ideas on how to do magic. Naturally, hopes ran very high for *Dark Messiah* on multiple levels, and fans looked forward to more produce from the developer while *Might & Magic* aficionados were piqued, yet curious at the new take on the license.

It is not wrong to call *Dark Messiah* an 'Action-Fantasy-FPS' because it literally is the first-person shooter template, but with a more involved combat system and *Deus Ex* style character development. The action initially unfolds with gusto and has you running for your life not once, but twice. Later, this enthusiasm peters out and leaves you ambling around with no direction, until you eventually stumble into the correct area/gate.

Much of what *Dark Messiah* sets out to do follows this one-two habit of setting up something great, only to leave you feeling slightly dejected. For instance, the combat system is the heart and soul of *Dark Messiah*. When it works, the combat is a visceral whirlwind of clashing blades, exploding fireballs and pinpoint-accurate arrow shots. All of these can be improved through the experience system, letting you slot points into combat, magic, stealth or other RPG things. When it doesn't work (which is often the case), it's with spectacular effect. *Dark Messiah* is a very buggy game and will crash to desktop, refuse to load or outright fail to activate the necessary script to progress. Something to note: if you've installed the DVD version of *Dark Messiah* and opted in on the multiplayer, it will install Steam. Steam alone is not a problem, but for some reason Steam will attempt to download the entire *Dark Messiah* again, leaving you with two copies of the game on your hard drive and an irritating download bill. So be sure to stop or pause the Steam download the moment after installing the multiplayer.

There is a lot to *Dark Messiah*, especially in the level design. The various set-pieces are incredible while the smaller puzzles are a welcome addition, especially the custom smithing of weapons. The various enemies you face are detailed and

incredibly animated. There just aren't enough of them. After the near-thousandth Orc and Goblin you start to wish for something else to kill. At the end of the day, one gets the feeling that Arkane had a hard time getting to grips with the Source engine. Functionality seems raw and unpolished, while much of the game is too much like a *Half-Life 2* modification. The multiplayer holds its own with remarkable appeal, the multi-levelled campaign mode allows you to upgrade your stats as you play, and you get to choose a variety of classes. It may have been better for everyone if the multiplayer had been a standalone purchase on Steam.

One could easily equate *Dark Messiah* to a one-night stand: fun and slightly awkward if you're up for it, but not really something you'll look back on with tenderness. **NAG**

BOTTOM LINE

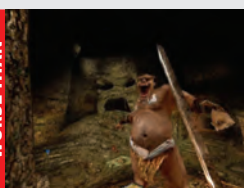
It tries so hard and most times you can enjoy the attempts, but ultimately the experience is instantly forgettable.

69/100

Going Commando



Arx Fatalis



gearsofwar.com



GEARS OF WAR

EMERGENCE DAY 17.11.06



Microsoft
game studios

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Jump in.



VITAL INFO

Platforms

Reviewed on 360

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R384 (Kalahari.net)

Developer

Neversoft Interactive

Publisher

Activision

Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

16+

Specifications

Online: Yes

Controllers: 1

Players: 1

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BOTTOM LINE

Trying to piggyback on the popularity of its predecessors, *Tony Hawk's American Wasteland* fails to impress with its lack of good next-generation graphics and poor gameplay. It is easy to see that no extra work was put into fully converting this title for the Xbox 360.

65/100

Any skating game that is not Tony Hawk

AS GOOD AS

Tony Hawk: Underground 2

WORSE THAN

TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND

IS IT A GOOD thing that the *Tony Hawk* games dominate the skating genre? Fans of the series were expecting something close to legendary with the first next-gen Tony, but instead have been totally let down.

To start off, let's look at the controls. Neversoft did a pretty good job using the features of the Xbox 360, while gamers will find it is similar to its counterpart, the PS2. An added bonus is riding a BMX bike. The controls are quite unique compared to other games that specifically focus on these. Players will also find it more challenging to perform tricks, as there is more to it now than the usual direction and button combinations found in the series. However, the graphics are a big problem on the Xbox 360. With the resolutions on this platform it is obvious that Neversoft took a few shortcuts to finish the game quickly. Firstly, the lighting is terrible, considering its predecessors. Secondly, the characters have not been properly scaled to the new resolutions, and are pretty badly displayed.

There is a fairly decent storyline that features a skater starting out in L.A. He's trying to make it into the professional world after running away from home. Everyone has told him he is a nobody, and he befriends a group of skaters who help him along. For people who have never really played *Tony Hawk* for the story

but for the skating, in this release it is a big letdown. It is an easy game, even on the most challenging of settings. There are also very few decent challenges available, other than those that ask for a plant here or a grind there. You are allowed to do off-the-board tricks as well, but unfortunately they are mostly useless for the actual story.

A saving grace for *American Wasteland* is that Neversoft also included a classic mode, featuring many previously seen levels, which feature all the original challenges missing from the story mode. Another nice feature is that there are no more in-game loading screens, which gives it a more realistic feel as you explore the wastelands of L.A. This game is not a good example of a *Tony Hawk* game, and diehard fans will probably shelve it quite quickly. However, if you want to play it for the rundown L.A. scenery and the story, go ahead and try it out. **NAG**

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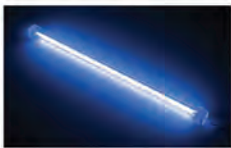
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VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R469

Developer

Namco Bandai

Publisher

SCEE

Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games [011] 445-7960

Genre

Simulation

Age Restriction

12+

Specifications

Online: No

Controllers: 1-2

Players: 1-2

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BOTTOM LINE

Ace Combat: The Belkan War stays true to its roots, offering a fast-paced and entertaining flight combat experience with beautiful visuals and a competent storyline. It offers little in the way of major innovation over its predecessors, but is nonetheless a highly-polished and well-produced arcade-style flight combat title, suited both to newcomers and veterans of the series.

72/100

Ace Combat 5



Iceman



ACE COMBAT: THE BELKAN WAR

THE LATEST TITLE IN Namco's popular *Ace Combat* series has arrived, and once again proves to be a competent and enjoyable flight-combat game, though it offers very little innovation over its predecessors. Set before the events of the other titles in the series, *Ace Combat: The Belkan War* focuses on a character-orientated story, set against the backdrop of the first war involving the fictitious nation of Belka. In a fashion typical of the series, the game uses its storyline to explore some of the more personal elements of war and its surrounding ideological quandaries, in an effort to give some meaning to the hours of aerial action that the game provides. The story is competent and often compelling, if somewhat clichéd, but its impact is unfortunately hampered by the poorly produced cut-scenes through which it's told.

Nonetheless, the more important aspect of *The Belkan War* is, of course, the actual play dynamic. Already having five similar titles under its belt, Namco has flight combat down to a fine art. There are no drastic changes to the dynamic employed in the series' previous iterations, but a few refinements have been made, and they do well to positively augment the *Ace Combat* experience. Perhaps the most significant change comes in the way of AI. Not only has the wingman AI been improved to the point where your wingman can actually provide significant assistance to you rather than hindrance during missions, but the enemy AI is also vastly improved. Most of the legions of foes you'll face are still relatively easy to dispose of, but the enemy forces now include a number of 'Ace' pilots. These enemies fly personalised aircraft and are infinitely stronger and more agile than the average airborne foes you'll face in droves. The game throws these Aces into the mix at the most inopportune times – it's not unusual to have struggled through a mission, and completed all its objectives, only to have to confront a number of Aces on your way back. Although it is frustrating to have to replay an entire mission if they manage to take you out, it does add a new challenging dimension to the title, and defeating the Ace opponents is undoubtedly a rewarding experience.

Namco has done well to vary the objectives of each mission sufficiently to keep the game interesting. Ultimately, most missions boil down to destroying various things, but the game balances out by pitting you against ground, aerial and even naval targets. Another noticeable improvement is the inclusion of an expanded multiplayer mode, which allows the option of

cooperative or competitive split-screen dog-fighting, which greatly contributes to the title's longevity.

In keeping with tradition, the game is certainly far more of an arcade-style title than a simulation. Although this may not appeal to hardcore PC flight simulation fans, it does mean that the game is accessible and enjoyable, even for novices. Certainly, the familiar controls and play dynamic should appeal to fans of the series, who will feel quite at home with this latest *Ace Combat* instalment.

Visually, Namco has upheld the franchise's legacy for graphical excellence. Everything from the aircraft models (which include the likes of the F-4, F-15, F-22, MiG-29, YF-23 and myriad others) to the environments are beautifully detailed and realistic. Perhaps the soundtrack is somewhat uninspired, but it's never annoying, and the sound effects are quite convincing.

With *Ace Combat: The Belkan War*, Namco has preserved the formula that made previous titles in this series such a success, whilst at the same time taking care to effect a number of improvements to the play dynamic without drastically altering anything. If you're a veteran of the series, it may feel as if you're playing any of the previous titles in the series, but at the same time it guarantees that the latest *Ace Combat* title is an accessible, enjoyable, and well-produced flight combat title. If you're a newcomer to the genre, and are looking for an easy-to-pick-up, entertaining flight combat title, *Ace Combat: The Belkan War* will likely satisfy. Similarly, if you enjoyed the earlier titles and can't get enough of the arcade-style dog-fighting action, you won't be disappointed. Just don't expect anything revolutionary. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

Platforms

Reviewed on PC

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	GBA

Suggested Retail Price

R279

Developer

EA Sports

Publisher

EA Sports

Supplier

EA South Africa [011] 516-8300

Genre

Sport

Age Restriction

3+

Specifications

CPU: Pentium 1.3GHz

Video: 64MB graphics card

RAM: 256MB RAM

HDD: 1.2GB HDD

CD/DVD: 8 x Speed DVD-ROM

Players: 1 - 8

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BOTTOM LINE

FIFA 07 is EA's best effort to date. Gameplay has been radically improved, resulting in a challenging and engrossing title. The sheer volume of clubs, challenges and modes will delight fans of the genre.

73/100

FIFA 06



BETTER THAN

Pro Evolution Soccer 5



WORSE THAN



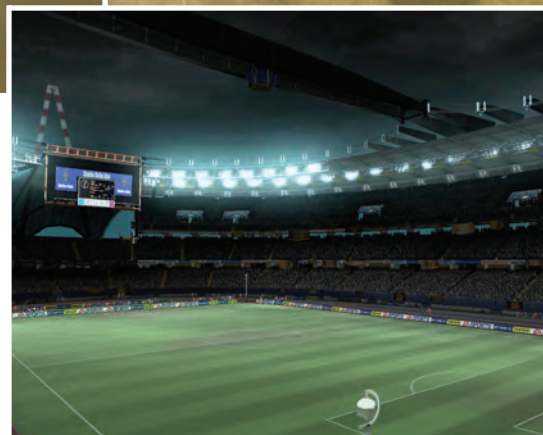
FIFA 07

FIFA TITLES APPEAR AS reliably as £30-million summer signings at Chelsea. Unlike the signings, however, the procession of uninspiring soccer titles off the EA conveyor belt has become downright dreary. It appears that EA has finally realised this lack of sensation, and *FIFA 07* is undoubtedly the finest *FIFA* game for quite some time.

The reason? Well, *FIFA 07* offers a colossal and stylish package, but let's forget that for now. Forget the flashy crowd effects. Forget the excellent soundtrack. Forget, even, that the game provides over 510 fully-licensed teams (including Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates). What has excited and inspired gamers down the ages is gameplay, pure and simple. *FIFA 07*, thank the soccer gods, does not let us down. Gone are the days of clumsily hoofing a ball from one team-mate to another, before placing a feeble shot beyond a clueless goalie. EA Sports has realised that to keep up with the Joneses (read: *Pro Evo Soccer* series), gameplay must be realistic and offer diverse challenges. For too many years *FIFA* titles ignored this hard fact, but the revolution finally began last year and, thankfully, the trend has continued. Passing is far more intuitive. Through balls require patience, coupled with intelligence, and keepers can be humbled with well-placed, endlessly satisfying, 30-yard screamers. The game's greats have also been gifted with signature moves, in a bid to further resemble the 'real deal'. It sees talents like Cristiano Ronaldo confounding opponents with mazy runs and fleet-footed foolery. Add to this improved ball physics and *FIFA 07* is the best 'playing' *FIFA* title to date.

The Manager Mode has also made pleasing headway. Focusing on a number of objectives that concern the board, it provides a tough but welcome alternative to the on-field action. Although one may question the undermining nature of this mode on EA's own *FIFA Manager* series, there's no denying it adds to *FIFA 07*'s robustness. The most innovative feature is the ability to transfer manager mode data from PS2 to PSP and carry on the fun in portable heaven.

FIFA's self-proclaimed selling-point is its brand new online mode. A player can log onto EA's server and select their favourite team from a number of leagues. These teams have a fixture-list that corresponds with real leagues. This means that games coincide with the real-life fixture. The player becomes a small but not insignificant link in a worldwide-side whose quest is to win the league. Each time a player wins a game against a



human opponent somewhere in cyberspace, he or she adds a point to the teams' tally. The team with the highest tally wins the match. This feature is not perfect, online performance is not great and co-op multiplayer is unfortunately non-existent. However, EA should be lauded for an innovative idea that, with some tweaking, may become something special in the annals of gaming.

For the net-phobe, the game still remains appealing via its various leagues and challenges, which are downright impressive in number. Although they don't offer much of a learning-curve and eventually become processional, they are numerous enough to cause disquiet for rival titles. This concerns PES in particular, who have become rather complacent in the knowledge that they currently present the best gameplay experience in soccer titles. They must surely be looking worriedly over their shoulder at *FIFA 07*'s all-round package.

Indeed, if EA keeps up the *FIFA 07* trend of improvement, combining improved gameplay with innovative features, it won't be long before it is crowned champion of soccer titles. **NAG**

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VITAL INFO

Platforms

Reviewed on PC

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	Wii

Suggested Retail Price

R299

Developer

EA Black Box

Publisher

EA Black Games

Supplier

EA South Africa [011] 516-8300

Genre

Arcade racer

Age Restriction

None

Specifications

CPU: 1.7 GHz + CPU

Video: 64MB DX9-compatible graphics card

RAM: 512MB

HDD: 5.3GB

CD/DVD: 2x or faster DVD-ROM

Players: 1

Internet: Online

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BOTTOM LINE

NFS Carbon is a rehash of last year's successful *Most Wanted* with a weaker storyline and a less charismatic bad guy in an Audi R8, rather than the M3 CSL. Nonetheless, it's a fun and action-packed arcade racer worth playing.

78/100

World Racing 2



NFS Most Wanted



NEED FOR SPEED: CARBON

IT'S THE SAME EVERY year, isn't it? EA rolls out upgrades to its strong titles and for the last three years the *Need for Speed* franchise has been successful enough to warrant an annual update. *NFS Carbon* has been released across a wide variety of platforms, offering the now-familiar blend of pulse-pounding arcade racing and filtered FMV cut-scenes as its predecessor, *NFS Most Wanted*.

NFS Carbon is a direct follow-on to the storyline that was so pleasingly crafted for *Most Wanted*. You return to the streets of the original game. The bad news is that your old mates now control the entire city, and none of them are particularly pleased with you after the suspicious incident that caused you to skip town so long ago...

In addition to the city streets, there are also Canyon Zones. These are isolated races that add some destructible railings for the prospect of some slow-mo "Oh no, my Lan Evo is falling off a cliff" moments. They're also the venue for some real hardcore Far Eastern mountain racing. Anyone who has watched *Initial D* knows the rules – two runs: on the first you follow and score points for putting pressure on your opponent through sheer proximity, bonus points for contact; on the second run you lead, with your opponent staying glued to your tail for the same reason.

Unfortunately, they don't really turn out quite as exciting as they sound. Apart from the Canyon scenes, EA has ditched the stupid drag races of *Most Wanted* in favour of drift racing, which is fun if you enjoy the drift scene. EA has also added three unique car classes from which to choose at the beginning of your career. Expect classics like the RX-7, as well as newer Lancer Evos, the 350Z, the exotics (Porsches, Lamborghinis, and Lotuses) and the 'muscles' such as the Comaro SS models.

The 'choose a faction' idea is really a lame way to improve replayability once you've completed the short-lived career game. There's a total of perhaps nine hours of playing time if you use your GPS map to jump locations. Still, every car is beautifully rendered, the races are fast and frantic through brightly-lit evening cityscapes, and the storyline engaging, if a bit overdone and overcomplicated in this iteration.

Another addition in *Carbon* is your crew. There are three types of 'wingmen' to choose – blockers, drafters and scouts – but none of them is particularly useful in the actual race. In fact, they can be obstructive and incredibly frustrating at times. The crew members available also have secondary skills, although none of these mean anything except for the Fabricator, without whom you can't access the new Autosculpt functions. Here you can customise individual elements of your vehicle to a limited extent – quite frankly a cheesy and half-hearted new feature.

As we've come to expect of *NFS*, these dodgy touch-ups, intended to make the game seem new when it's really just *Most Wanted* re-skinned, have been tacked on to a highly enjoyable and addictive arcade racer – one of the best of the genre. We really wish the story had lived up to the older title, and a longer career mode would have been welcome, but *NFS Carbon* is still a fun game if you're a fan of the series, or high-octane arcade racing of any kind! **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

Platforms

Reviewed on PC

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	GBA

Suggested Retail Price

R299

Developer

Interserv International, Inc.

Publisher

Namco

Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

Genre

Action RPG

Age Restriction

3+

Specifications

CPU: Pentium 4 1.8GHz

Video: 128MB graphics card

RAM: 512MB RAM

HDD: 5.9GB HDD

CD/DVD: CD/DVD-ROM

Players: 1-5

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Well, he's got something else on his mind. Namely me.

MAGE KNIGHT APOCALYPSE

WOE, FOR A GARGANTUAN beast of ineffable might, sporting five heads and an extraordinarily bad temper, hath been awakened, to usher in an age of chaos and destruction! The Land is plagued with an inexorable blight, its peoples harassed by the foul and relentless minions of a faceless evil, and many other generic fantasy plot elements as well! The Solanavi, a cabal of sage beings, has summoned five heroes to save the world. Because five heroes can save the world against innumerable legions of foes. Because you're all just that special.

Mage Knight Apocalypse is based on a long-standing, tabletop, miniature war game that is surely a developer's dream come true. There's little conceptual development involved, as the franchise has an established canon, including a universe, mythology, bestiaries, character classes and all that tommyrot. So it's mostly a matter of building an engine, plugging in some graphics, and cashing in. In this case, the developers decided to create an action-heavy RPG à la *Diablo* and *Dungeon Siege*, with grand promises of monsters to bash, and lots of stuff to collect. Sounds great.

It's not. The first thing that strikes you about this game is that the menu font is barely legible. The second thing, once you fumble your way past these esoteric hieroglyphs, is that the vaunted 'dramatic free camera' makes playing the game nigh impossible. The primary attack is set to left mouse, secondary to the right, and the camera? To the middle. Alternatively, you can hold down the 'N' key and move the mouse to rotate the camera, but that's not terribly commodious when two dozen orcs are bearing down on you, and you're trying desperately to lock onto a target – with the mouse.

The available playable characters aren't all that exciting. There's a dwarf, an Amazon, an elf, a vampire, and some sort of fancy lizard. Each race has three areas of expertise. For example, the dwarf can develop skills in gunnery, explosives, and vanilla melee bashing. One of the few remarkable aspects



Well done. I'm not sure where the Orcs came from, but they've come in force and have taken the Rain Temple for themselves. Most of our troops had been sent away to deal with another Orc threat elsewhere. I'm guessing now that was a feint and the real attack was here at the Rain Temple. If I hadn't been hunting when the attack came, I would have been inside with the others.

Press any key to continue.

The dwarf launched his special attack: long speeches!

of this game is that much like *Dungeon Siege 2*, instead of receiving allocatable XP points, your character's skills are improved by using them. So, if you want to bump up your vampire expertise, make sure you use an appropriate guzzle attack strategy.

During most quests, you'll be joined by computer-controlled allies, but don't expect them to ably assist you. They're likely to stand by, picking their noses, or being thwarted conveniently by the inscrutably difficult navigation of a corner. All this while you fend off the infernal hordes on your lonesome.

The plot is rather boring and very linear, with very little in the way of optional side-quests. Furthermore, this is undermined by an inexplicably lenient system of dying and respawning. If your character dies, you'll respawn nearby, with all your gear intact and no penalty incurred, while the enemies that clobbered you remain as they were. Rush back into the fray, die and repeat, until they're all reduced to small leather pouches of collectible stuff. The interface is a tad clumsy, dialogue is choppy, and the game will crash on a whim.

All in all, however, it's not irredeemably abominable. The graphics are sort of nice, item drops are generous and varied, there's a decent item forging system, and, despite its many defects, there is a modicum of utterly brainless entertainment. Just don't expect it to hold your attention. **NAG**

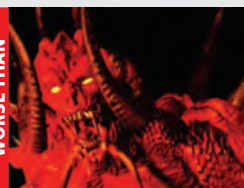
BOTTOM LINE

A buggy, frustrating and tediously linear click-'n'-slash dungeon crawler, which, apart from some pretty bloom effects and an interesting (if not entirely original) character development system, hasn't very much else to offer.

41/100

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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R529

■ Developer

Namco

■ Publisher

Namco

■ Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games [011] 445-7960

■ Genre

Flight Simulator

■ Age Restriction

12+

■ Specifications

Players: 1

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BOTTOM LINE

Even players who don't usually play flight simulators are likely to enjoy this one. It strikes a sound balance between realistic simulation and arcade action.

74/100

ACE COMBAT X: SKIES OF DECEPTION

A FLIGHT SIMULATOR ON THE PSP? And why not? The little handheld console has decent processing power and fairly versatile controls, including an analogue stick. So, we eagerly took this one up and started playing. In short, we were not disappointed!

Let's first handle the controls. The analogue stick simulates the joystick (pitch and roll), while the other buttons take care of the remaining functions, such as rudder (yaw), target acquisition, weapon selection, weapon firing and throttle. In all honesty, it does take some getting used to. A flight stick is not usually operated by a single thumb, but after tuning into the interface's quirks, we learned to be more subtle on the controls, and this is how this game is played. Players pilot jet fighters and fighter-bombers, which are quite responsive but not very forgiving aircraft. The aircraft and weapons are a curious blend of factually based and purely fictitious.

The main game mode is a single-player campaign. It is semi-linear, which means that missions can be played in differing sequences, and some need not be played at all. However, completing any given mission will yield a benefit, such as the absence of a particular weapon among enemy forces in subsequent missions. During the course of a campaign, players amass income with which to upgrade their craft. Different aircraft can be purchased, as well as various weapons. A welcome element is that the player is not limited to owning a single aircraft, but can have several in the hangar and can choose any of these for different missions. Weapon load-outs can also be tailored to individual missions.

This game tickled us in every respect, given what it is and the platform on which it is presented. The graphics and sound are excellent too. We can recommend it to most gamers, even those who aren't diehard flight-sim fans. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R400

■ Developer

EA Sports

■ Publisher

EA Sports

■ Supplier

EA South Africa [011] 516-8300

■ Genre

Racing

■ Age Restriction

3+

■ Specifications

Online: No

Controllers: 2

Players: 1-2

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BOTTOM LINE

Fans of EA Sports' NASCAR series will be disappointed with the latest offering. While not a poor game, there is little to set it apart from its predecessor. Lack of improvements and new features weigh down this title considerably.

68/100

NASCAR 07

LIKE THE ENDLESS CURVES of the ovals it so accurately depicts, EA Sports' NASCAR series motors on and on. Lamentably, it has just been shunted into a faltering, stuttering slide via its latest offering. NASCAR 07 is not a bad game, and if it had no predecessors it might even be considered a great one. It just lacks originality. The title is virtually unchanged from last year's NASCAR 06. No new features and minimal modifications in gameplay have resulted in a very stale product.

The title follows the circuit-racing NASCAR series. The heart of the game lies in its career mode, which allows the player to work up from a modified series to the elite Nextel Cup. In addition, the player can purchase teams to manage. The player's task is to win races by driving him or herself to victory, or build up a 'power posse' of individuals to take the

team titles. Initially this proves challenging, but it becomes cumbersome when racing two or more series at once. The player will have to forfeit events that have conflicting race-days. The challenge mode, on the other hand, will delight any hot-blooded NASCAR fan. Re-enacting a number of incidents that occurred during last year's Nextel Cup, the player also gets to indulge in numerous interviews with the series' elite drivers.

Car handling is tolerable but leans towards arcade, rather than simulation. The saving grace for on-track action appears with the teamwork ability, allowing players to instruct teammates to block rivals or help out with slipstreaming. On the whole, however, gameplay is fair, yet uninspiring.

NASCAR 07 adds a blur-effect to simulate a feeling of speed. Disappointingly, it fails in its endeavours, much like the title, which is a carbon-copy of its predecessor in everything but name. EA's NASCAR series is going nowhere, fast. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R529

■ Developer

Namco Bandai

■ Publisher

Namco Bandai

■ Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games [011] 445-7960

■ Genre

Racing

■ Age Restriction

3+

■ Specifications

Wireless: Yes

Online: No

Game Sharing: No

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BOTTOM LINE

What should be a great game is made less so thanks to the limited controls

74/100



MOTOGP

THE *MOTOGP* SERIES HAS always been an icon for its genre, and a favourite of many biking fans. It comes as no surprise that Namco-Bandai has finally developed a version for the PlayStation Portable. Featuring excellent graphics and an addictive arcade mode for those who just want to switch on and race, this is truly a gem.

The game features a season mode, where the player needs to win as many races as possible to get a better rank against some of the top pros in the world. It also features an arcade mode where players just ride for the fun of it. Unfortunately, players will see that the developers were not able to add as much content, compared to its PlayStation 2 version. The career mode is pretty bare with only a small number of courses to race and a limited number of bikes to buy. Nevertheless, for a portable machine this will be an excellent choice when camping out.

The one major problem is the controls, which, although they are pretty good, are limited with the PSP only having one



analogue stick. Players will miss the ability to control the speed by braking on the second stick. Instead, they have to use the buttons, which are not as good. The controls are a lot more frustrating around a corner, as you virtually have to come to a complete stop in order to complete the turn.

Apart from the controls, *MotoGP* is a pretty solid racing game for the PSP, enabling eight players to link up and race against each other. So, if you have an itch for a good bike game on the portable screen and you want to wrestle for control, this is a good choice. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R177

■ Developer

Techland

■ Publisher

Topware Interactive

■ Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

■ Genre

First Person Shooter

■ Age Restriction

16+

■ Specifications

CPU: 1.3GHz processor

Video: 64MB graphics card

RAM: 256MB RAM

HDD: 2GB HDD

CD/DVD: 2 CD-ROM

Internet: Not required, but supported

Players: 1 - 32

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BOTTOM LINE

Outdated, with little innovation and no surprises.

53/100

CHROME SPECFORCE

ANOTHER SEQUEL TO *CHROME*, *Chrome Specforce* is an action-filled, first-person shooter by Techland. It is a fairly standard FPS similar to *Halo*, but it's definitely not as good. Players assume the role of Bolt Logan, a member of the elite Spec force unit, who is assigned to restore order on the planet Estrella. Using the standard set of weapons and vehicles, you will play through many expansive missions in both indoor and outdoor settings.

When considering playability, most folk look directly at what kind of arsenal power is available. Unfortunately, there is not much to speak of, leaving you feeling frustrated. You also have to shoot most enemies many, many times before they finally fall. This makes the gameplay disappointing, and after your twentieth kill, it gets a bit monotonous. The physics of the game are also not well planned and this is evident in the vehicles. A speeder can turn without skidding at fast speeds, and ramping has almost no lift.

Graphically the game is quite outdated on most of the settings, and the environment sprites just rotate when you walk around, instead of remaining stationary as a complete three dimensional model would behave. The enemy models are actually pretty good, considering the environment, but they do lack variety. Unfortunately, the sound effects of guns firing and vehicle engines do not seem appropriate, and this makes them a whole lot less menacing than intended.

This can all be forgiven with the multiplayer mode, where it seems much more effort has been expended. The game also



features an editor, allowing you to create some good maps and mods. Unfortunately, this will not be a game to remember, but with the editor, players might just be able to create a better version than the developers did. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R250

Developer

Petroglyph

Publisher

LucasArts

Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

Genre

RTS

Age Restriction

12+

Specifications

CPU: Pentium 4 1.0GHz

Video: 32MB graphics card

RAM: 256MB RAM

HDD: 2.5GB HDD

CD/DVD: DVD-ROM

Internet: Not required, but supported

Players: 1-8

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BOTTOM LINE

Mediocre graphics, adequate sound and unoriginal game dynamic - dead average.

54/100

EMPIRE AT WAR: FORCES OF CORRUPTION

WHEN *STAR WARS: EMPIRE at War* came out, it made a modest splash in some circles, as it offered a fairly innovative game dynamic that provided action on different levels: galactic, orbital and planet-side. The galactic view allowed players to manage resources and military forces on a strategic level, while the other two dished up tactical combat action. Although fairly unique and well put together, the game failed to significantly turn heads in a commercial sense, possibly because it was too complex for most players, particularly those seeking fast-paced action.

Forces Of Corruption is the expansion to that game. It has been handled in a fairly unorthodox fashion. Instead of providing an extension to the storyline, with additional missions and units for both existing factions, LucasArts opted to add onto the game by introducing a third faction. The game's title, *Forces of Corruption*, may suggest that we would be delving into the Dark Side of the Force, perhaps encountering and controlling the Sith. Disappointingly, this is not the case. These 'forces of corruption' are the far less mystical, far more mundane Zann Consortium, which essentially is a galactic mafia.

The new game elements that have been introduced do add to the game's enjoyment. Certain new mechanics have been introduced for



use by the corrupt Zann Consortium, but they feel largely synthetic and cosmetic – they play rather similarly to the Rebels' stealthy activities. In story mode, the word 'corruption' is overused, both as a noun and as a verb, and it becomes tiring. In fact, when the game characters keep talking in this fashion it feels rather contrived.

Overall, the game isn't bad, but it fails to bring any 'wow' value. There's nothing new, save for a couple of locations, which are adequately presented. Huge fans of the base game *Star Wars: Empire at War* are likely to enjoy this one, but we cannot heartily recommend it, particularly to first-time players. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Platforms

Reviewed on PS2

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R529

Developer

Team 17

Publisher

SCEE

Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games [11] 445-7960

Genre

Puzzle

Age Restriction

3+

Specifications

Online: No

Controllers: 1

Players: 1

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BOTTOM LINE

Although the Eyetoy levels are far from perfect, this PSP port superbly revives the magic of what was a pioneer of the puzzle-game genre.

71/100

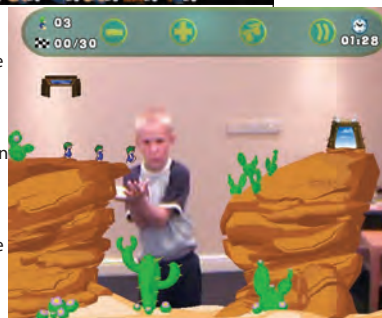
EYETOY LEMMINGS

FOR THOSE WHO AREN'T familiar with the concept, *Lemmings*, originally released over 15 years ago on Amiga, broadly revolves around guiding a group of hapless rodents around a number of obstacles. The main aim is to safely move as many lemmings as possible, from one predetermined point to another. The twist is that these creatures have absolutely no concept of self-preservation and are quite content to march off cliffs, into meat grinders, or into pools of steaming lava, if left to their own devices. Each level has a fixed number of abilities with which you can endow your lemmings. For example, you may be able to give them pickaxes with which to tunnel, climbing boots for scaling walls, or parachutes (actually, umbrellas) to allow them to land safely without splattering their insides on the floor. Each level offers you limited tools and requires that you save a certain number of lemmings to succeed. The game is ported from the earlier-released PSP version, with the addition of a number of Eyetoy compatible levels, which allow you to interact with the environment through the USB camera. Although these levels are a novel addition, the Eyetoy functionality is still a little rough; background objects and room lighting often make your task more difficult. However, the other levels in the game translate to the PS2 controller very well, and perfectly recreate the mix of frustration and addictive enjoyment that made the PC series such a success. Improvements have refined the gaming experience, such as the ability to zoom in on the action and put the game into fast forward.

Lemmings is, perhaps, the holy grail of puzzle games, and its re-emergence is quite welcome. Anyone with fond memories of the earlier games will find that the PS2 incarnation proves that the concept hasn't aged, and that it is still immensely enjoyable



and addictive. The polished graphics bring the cartoon-esque lemmings to life and, despite the lack of a mouse, the controls are surprisingly smooth. The inclusion of over 150 levels and a level editor means that the experience won't be too short-lived. Even the slightly flawed Eyetoy levels have their moments. It's not groundbreaking, but the brilliance of *Lemmings* has always been its sheer simplicity, and that remains true to this day. If you've never experienced the joys of *Lemmings*, you owe it to yourself, and if you're the nostalgic sort who fondly remembers spending hours doing your bit for the conservation of the little green-haired rodents, you're likely to get a kick out of this too. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R279

Developer

Z-Axis

Publisher

Activision

Supplier

Megarom [011] 234-2680

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

12+

Specifications

Controllers: 1

Players: 1

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BOTTOM LINE

A typical example of a license cash-in game with shallow gameplay, boring storyline and mindlessly simplistic mechanics. *X-Men 3* is a game your grandparents will probably get you for Christmas.

45/100



X-MEN 3: THE OFFICIAL GAME

XMEN 3: THE OFFICIAL Game. With a name like that, it's certain that a good portion of NAG's readers know what's coming. Actually it's three separate games. It doesn't follow the storyline of any of the three movies. It's literally three separate games in three separate genres. The positive side is that you get to play Wolverine, Nightcrawler and Iceman. However, the downside is that you only get to play as those three characters. Admittedly, the three different games are playable, and although they're ultimately unspectacular and extremely pedestrian, they do their job.

The environments are drab, utterly utilitarian, and very simplistic. The focus is weighted entirely on the combat system, which, while responsive and logical, is simply not rich, stylish or deep enough to save the game from being boring. You are awarded skill points for completing missions which you

can spend on 'mutations', but these simply change the functional modifiers on the game's rules. This means that you do more damage, heal faster and so on, but it just comes down to you killing the enemy faster.

Overall, while the game seems to have a few progressive concepts, it ends up short-lived and extremely shallow. While the graphics are clean and functional, quite frankly they're an embarrassment to the capabilities of the platform and to the general level of aesthetic quality that games boast today. The competent gameplay doesn't offer much. The developers seem to have been aware of contemporary trends and conventions, but those conventions seem to be unfamiliar, even precarious territory for them. The resulting game is something that's difficult to recommend over the platform's other offerings. **NAG**

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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

\$8.95 (less than R80)

■ Developer

Telltale Games

■ Publisher

Telltale Games

■ Supplier

www.telltale.com

■ Genre

Adventure

■ Age Restriction

All

■ Specifications

CPU: 1GHz CPU

Video: 128MB graphics card

RAM: 256MB

HDD: 70MB

CD/DVD: N/A

Internet: Validation

Players: 1

BOTTOM LINE

It's quintessentially a *Sam & Max* adventure game that only really jaded fans won't like

90/100

SAM & MAX:
CULTURE SHOCK

"Remember when you went for therapy, Sam?"

"Yeah. The court won't make that mistake again!"

IT WASN'T LONG AGO that *Lucasarts* broke the hearts of thousands of fans when it canned the new *Sam & Max* game. Fortunately a new developer, generously staffed by ex-Lucasarts employees, had started making a name for itself with *Bone*, an adventure title based on the graphic novel series. Soon after, Telltale announced that a new *Sam & Max* game is in the works, in collaboration with the duo's creator, Steve Purcell. Needless to say, we were excited. Considering the two endeared an audience that has matured quite considerably since the first game, it was a delicate tightrope to walk.

The good news is that the first episode of *Sam & Max's* new adventure is solidly rooted in the spirit of the original. The voice actors, while not the originals, are right on par and so is the writing. In fact, the puns and weird jokes are a bit overkill at times, but you can't have too much of that in a *Sam & Max* universe. Likewise, the puzzles that players are presented with are very traditional - an infusion of obvious logic and bizarre thinking. In a nutshell, as a resurrection of SCUMM values, *Sam & Max* may well be adventure's new messiah.

Ultimately, it's a bit short, but that's to be expected from an episodic game that will cost you a measly few bucks. Eventually *Culture Shock* will consist of six episodes, which, judging by the first release's length, will far exceed the size of the original game. Welcome back, *Sam & Max*! **NAG**



When a homicidal white bunny pointed at it, the caption wisely kept quite



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R299

■ Developer

ArenaNet

■ Publisher

NCSoft

■ Supplier

Megaron [011] 234-2680

■ Genre

MMORPG

■ Age Restriction

All

■ Specifications

CPU: Pentium III 1 GHz

Video: 64 MB graphics card

RAM: 512MB

HDD: 4GB

CD/DVD: 2x DVD-ROM

Internet: Required

Players: 1

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BOTTOM LINE

Each new chapter improves upon the last. *Nightfall* is no exception.

87/100

GUILD WARS: NIGHTFALL

NIGHTFALL IS THE THIRD campaign in the *Guild Wars* saga. As with the previous *Factions* chapter, it can be played entirely standalone, or linked into the existing campaigns. Characters and items are able to move freely between all three campaigns, even the new Heroes feature introduced with *Nightfall*. By far the biggest additions are the Heroes themselves. Certain quests reward players with Heroes who can be ordered about, adjusted and kitted to your liking. They level up with you, and follow orders with remarkable intelligence. It allows you to equip them with new weapons, upgrade their armour and even manually activate their skills, making them indispensable. They count as a human partner in terms of quest requirements, which lets you undertake quests that previously required another flesh-and-blood player. Two new classes are introduced with *Nightfall*, the Dervish and the Paragon. The Paragon are elaborated

warriors with various Shouts and Chants to buff party members. The Dervish are scythe-wielding front-liners with powerful transformations and divine skills. Both the new classes and Heroes can be used in the new PvP and Guild options. Hero vs. Hero battles enable you to fight in PvP against other players, along with three Heroes. Guilds have been supplemented with four new halls and new areas to battle in. The new campaign setting, the realm of Elona, is modelled on most of the African continent and even a few creatures and plants seem familiar (such as the Jacaranda). An odd (but welcome) addition is mouth-movement on characters during cut-scene speech. It's the little things that count, and *Nightfall* adds enough of these, along with the bigger things to keep it fresh and varied. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R50

Developer

Gameloft

Publisher

Gameloft

Supplier

www.thumbtribe.co.za

Genre

Platformer

Download Code

SMS: tribe 02003004F0 to 978

NB: make sure you leave a space after the word **tribe**.

Check www.thumbtribe.co.za for phone compatibility and downloading instructions.

OPEN SEASON

OPEN SEASON IS A hilarious animated movie and can now be played as a fun little mobile game. Playing as both Boog and Elliot throughout some colourful levels, you will have to outwit the hunters and find the woo-hoo bars in order to achieve success.

The playability style of this game is set in a 2D platform world, which seems very similar to some of the old Nintendo games with hints of *Mario Bros*, only with better graphics. The graphics are rich and vibrant with scenes that look like they come straight out of the movie as well as well-detailed characters.

There is little to be said regarding sound other than that they achieve the desired affect, bringing the game to life on your phone.

Open Season offers a few entertaining hours of play. There are many different ways of completing



the levels, which will leave you wanting to play it over and over in order to find all those woo-hoo bars. **NAG**

Fun, but predictable 75/100

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R50

Developer

THQ Mobile

Publisher

THQ Mobile

Supplier

www.thumbtribe.co.za

Genre

Freeform

Download Code

SMS: tribe 0300300450 to 978

NB: make sure you leave a space after the word **tribe**.

Check www.thumbtribe.co.za for phone compatibility and downloading instructions.

SAINTS ROW

SAINTS ROW ON THE phone is a difficult game to describe. It is similar to the original *Grand Theft Auto* in camera angles, but it has a slightly more complex control system. The controls can be confusing at times. For example, when you are driving, the up button is forward even though you are travelling south (downwards). This means that the directional buttons also get reversed when travelling this way.

The graphics in *Saints Row* are quite disappointing compared to other mobile games, as the characters have very little detail. This might be due to the fact that the game is slightly longer than most mobile games. If you can get your mind around the controls and graphics, the playability is well planned with free roaming maps to explore. There is hardly any sound in the game, but once again this is probably due to the game's length.



To wrap up, *Saints Row* is good for those who enjoy GTA-based games with many hours of playability. **NAG**

A slightly clumsy old-school GTA 80/100

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC	PS2	PS3	PSP
XBOX	360	DS	MOB

Suggested Retail Price

R50

Developer

Gameloft

Publisher

Gameloft

Supplier

www.thumbtribe.co.za

Genre

Action

Download Code

SMS: tribe 0200300560 to 978

NB: make sure you leave a space after the word **tribe**.

Check www.thumbtribe.co.za for phone compatibility and downloading instructions.

SPLINTER CELL DOUBLE AGENT

SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT has been a big hit on consoles and PCs everywhere and now there is a version for your phone. A 2D platform type game, *Splinter Cell* will provide an hour or two of fun for anyone. You progress from breaking someone out of prison while dodging helicopters and rappelling down buildings, to diving with sharks and more. There are definitely some exciting moments.

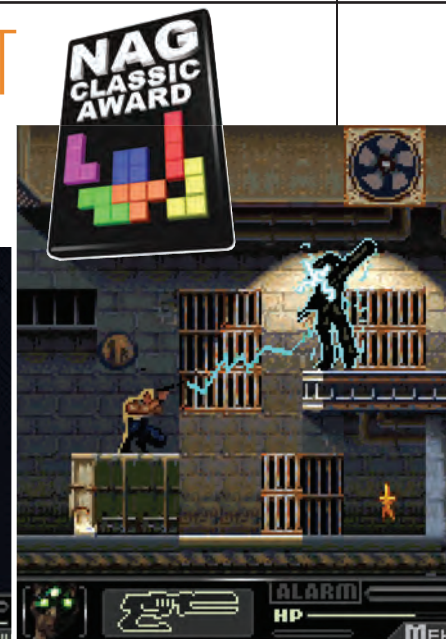
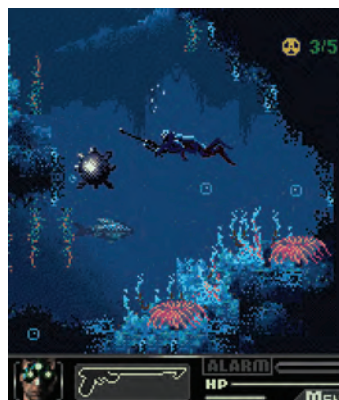
The graphics are extremely well done considering the size limitations of the game, and it has some interesting special effects here and there. The lighting works well too, which coincides with the stealth element.

The game does have some sound, but most of the time you will not even notice it. As can be expected from the mobile range, sounds are average with little variance, but they do work.

If you are looking for an escape from some menial

task, this is a good distraction that is well worth the money. **NAG**

Splinter Cell keeps delivering 90/100

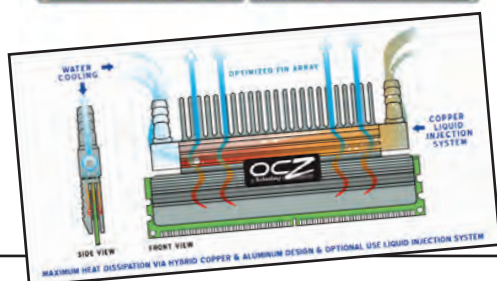


HARDWARE

FROM OCZ WORLD'S FASTEST WATER-COOLED DDR2 RAM

AS THE WORLD'S FASTEST DDR2, the PC2-9200, in combination with the innovative FlexXLC technology, is considerably the most ground-breaking and unique memory product in existence today.

These new modules feature the new OCZ FlexXLC (Xtreme Liquid Convention) heatsink, which delivers superior heat dissipation via a hybrid copper and aluminium design alterable between passive air and water-cooling. Among these thermal management advantages, the PC2-9200 FlexXLC also implements a new 8-layer PCB. This facilitates less 'crosstalk', consequently enhancing the module's total signal integrity. The PC2-9200 FlexXLC modules are optimised for the latest cutting-edge platforms and will be available in 2GB (2 x 1,024MB) dual-channel kits. As part of OCZ's line-up of premium memory, the PC2-9200 series is backed by a lifetime warranty and industry-leading technical support. Harnessing the achievement of leading-edge speed, high performance heat dissipation, and enhanced signal integrity, the unparalleled design of the OCZ PC2-9200 FlexXLC is a complete, all-encompassing solution, certain to set a new benchmark in enthusiast memory.

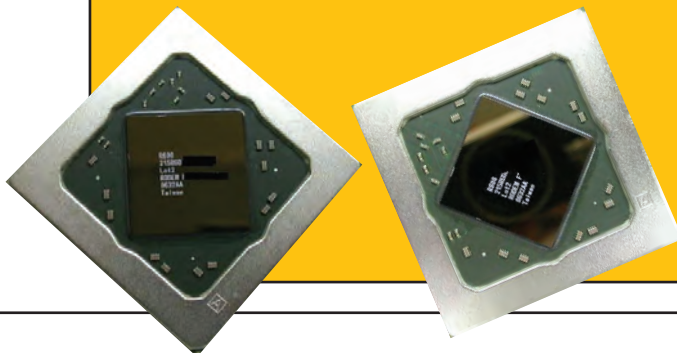


ASUS ROG STRIKER EXTREME MOTHERBOARD

Not to be outdone, Asus has released its second motherboard in the ROG line-up in the form of the Striker Extreme motherboard, which is specifically designed to simplify the DIY process and add style to gaming systems. As the newest member of the popular Republic of Gamers (ROG) series, the nForce 680i SLI-based Striker Extreme supports Intel Quad-Core Processor and NVIDIA's Quad-SLI technology, and is ready for the new 1,333MHz FSB specification. Key features of the motherboard include the famed LCD poster, EL I/O with onboard LEDs for easy connection, SupremeFX audio riser card and other features that make the Striker Extreme the ideal enthusiast board. Overclocking is one of the strong points of this board with reported overlocks well above the 500MHz mark (2GHz QDR).

ATI R600 TO RELEASE ON THE 20TH OF THIS MONTH

ATI's first DirectX 10 part, positioned to take on last year's NVIDIA GeForce 8800 GTX, is scheduled for release this month on the 20th. Sporting a massive bandwidth of over 140GB/sec through a 512-bit bus, leaked numbers seem to suggest that the graphics card is even faster than the NVIDIA part. The R600 is manufactured on an 80nm process, featuring 64 Shader pipelines, twice (32) the texture memory units of the Radeon X1950XTX, and 32 render outputs. Most importantly, the R600 is capable of 128 shader operations per cycle, bringing it on par with at least the NVIDIA G80 GPU. It remains to be seen if ATI is going to release the mid and budget versions of the cards on the same day, but sources say that only two versions of the R600 will be available on launch date, with the mid and budget variants arriving only later in the year. After the problems which ATI experienced with the first silicon of the chip, all issues seem to have been sorted out and manufacturing began back in 2006. With full support for DX10, and Vista launching within the same month, ATI is sure to have Vista drivers for its graphics card, which is something NVIDIA only recently managed, despite the G80 having been out for more than two months.



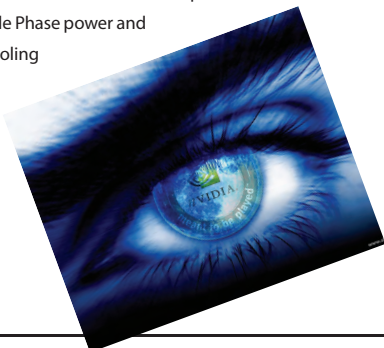
KILLER NIC

Killer NIC is the world's first network card designed specifically for online gamers. Using a patented Lag and Latency Reduction (LLR™) Technology, the NIC is supposed to give competitive gamers the edge by freeing up your computer's processor to focus on the game, giving you those extra frames per second and lower pings when you need them most. The Killer NIC uses a 400MHz network processing unit, runs a highly optimised version of embedded Linux to remove the burden of processing packets from your CPU, as well as delivers the packets extremely fast and efficiently.



GIGABYTE INTRODUCES NFORCE600 SERIES MOTHERBOARDS

Gigabyte has released two nForce 600 based motherboards, the GA-N680SLI-DQ6 and GA-N650SLI-DS4, modelled on the NVIDIA nForce 600 series chipsets, sporting support for the record-setting Intel Core 2 Quad processors. Designed for enthusiasts with extreme overclocking, the Gigabyte GA-N680SLI-DQ6 motherboard features the 680i SLI MCP chipset, with dual PCI Express x16 connectivity and an additional x8 lane of PCI Express connectivity, 1,333MHz FSB support for Intel next-generation Core 2 Quad CPUs and NVIDIA SLI-Ready memory technology, supporting DDR2 1,200MHz memory modules (up to 8 GB total system memory). Key features of the N680SLI-DQ6 boards include an all-solid capacitor design, Quad-Triple Phase power and other Gigabyte cooling technologies. The N650SLI-DS4 features the 650i SLI chipset, which, unlike the 680i, supports 2x 8-lane PCIExpress connectors.



FUJITSU SIEMENS CELSIUS V840 - HIGH PERFORMANCE WORKSTATION

Fujitsu Siemens Computers, the leading European IT provider and market leader in Germany, used its in-house trade fair, VISIT 2006, to launch its new CELSIUS V840 Workstation. This top-end workstation was developed to cater for the stiffest challenges facing multiprocessor applications in the fields of technological and scientific simulations, computer-aided design, digital content creation or software development. Based on the latest generation of AMD Opteron dual-core processors and faster DDR2 storage, and providing support for two high-end OpenGL graphics cards, it sets new standards in terms of performance. In addition, right from the start the system is equipped for future quad-core Opteron processors.



ABIT'S INTRODUCES IDOME PERSONAL DIGITAL THEATRE

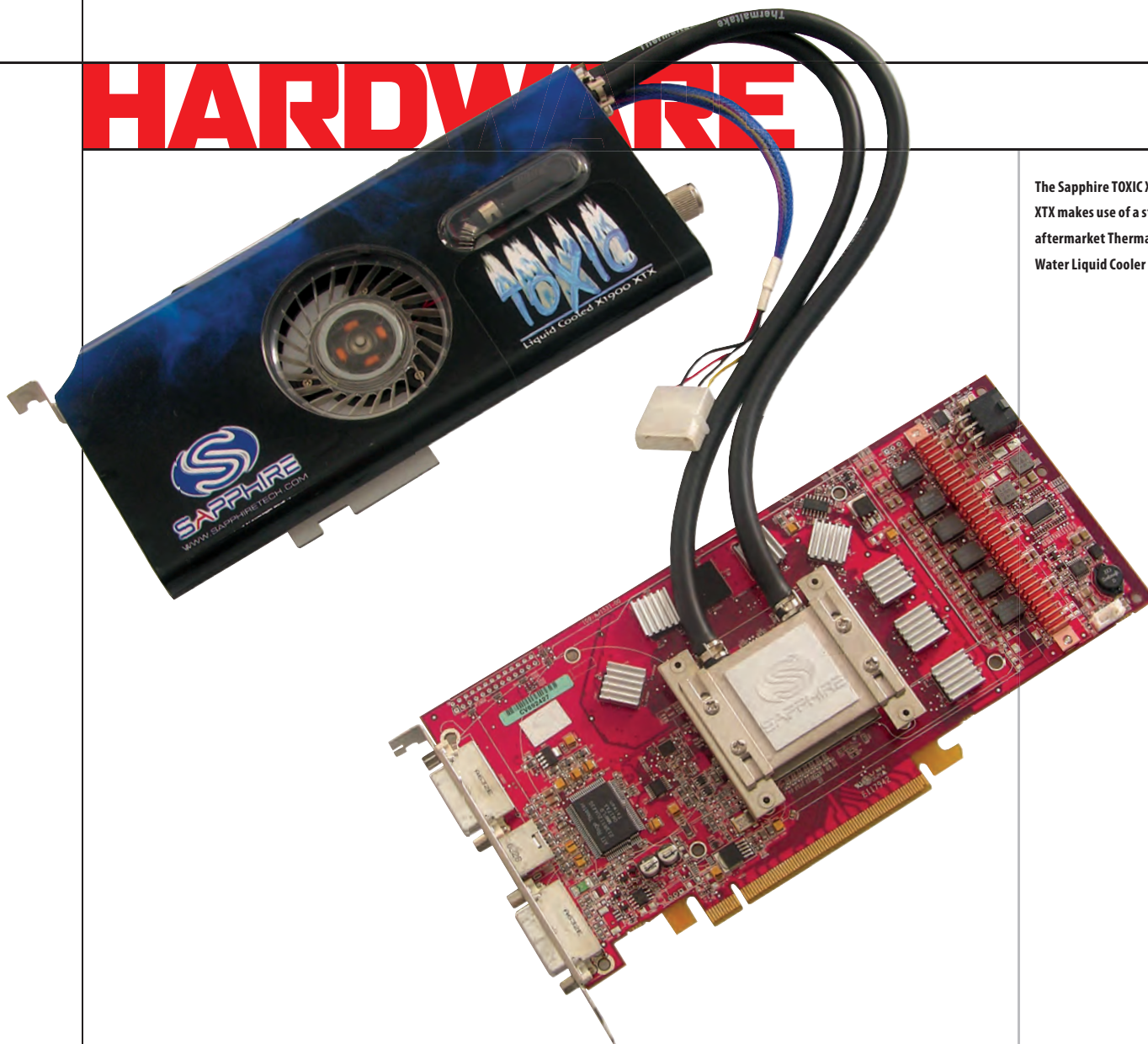
ABIT iDome's high quality solution consists of two compact speakers and a separate subwoofer, both with an integrated digital amplifier. Featuring high-quality drivers, a specific internal crossover and crystal clear circuitry, the iDome claims to deliver digital audio excellence in a most elegant way. Aimed at gamers and audio enthusiasts alike, the iDome set features unique ABIT features such as ABIT GuruChip, DBX technology and a wireless AP receiver. The iDome should be available locally later this month.



AWARDS

THE NAG HARDWARE AWARD is reserved for those products that really blow us away, whether by virtue of sheer grunt, value for money, or pure unspecified sexiness. This award will only be bestowed upon products that really stand out, even to our somewhat jaded and cynical eyes, and should be considered among the primary choices when purchasing products in the respective categories. Products that receive this accolade are beyond a doubt rather special. So watch out for them and take note!





The Sapphire TOXIC X1950 XTX makes use of a standard aftermarket Thermaltake Tide Water Liquid Cooler

SAPPHIRE RADEON TOXIC X1950 XTX

SAPPHIRE HAS ALWAYS BEEN a close AIB partner to ATI, often being the first AIB to offer products based on the new GPUs.

With the R580+ GPU or the Radeon X1950 XTX it was no different. Sapphire was the first AIB to have a card available that featured the re-spin of January's R580 GPU. However, Sapphire has developed an X1950 XTX card with a difference. Those who are not familiar with the TOXIC range would be doing themselves a favour by visiting the Sapphire site and reading about the TOXIC product line.

TOXIC basically means that the card is water-cooled out of the box. While this is not revolutionary, it does make life easier for a number of reasons. Firstly, unlike with a water block, which you might mount on the graphics card yourself, this one is under warranty and is guaranteed not to leak or destroy your graphics core. It also means that you get one of the quietest cooling solutions available, which is great considering that standard cooling can be very loud.

The cooling unit is manufactured by Thermaltake and is available separately. However, should you go this route, you will not get the warranties that you get when buying the TOXIC.

As far as presentation goes, Sapphire has gone and made something special. Even after this graphics card is no longer capable

of powering the latest games many years from now, you can show it off as a centerpiece in your lounge...

The graphics card is packaged in a translucent box that makes it look as if it is suspended in mid-air, which looks incredible.

As for the water-cooling kit, the unit makes use of a pure copper block and copper radiator, which are necessary since the entire cooling kit is pretty slim. The radiator fan has adaptable low and high speeds. While the low setting has appropriate noise levels, the high setting is a little intrusive and it doesn't significantly lower the temperatures enough to warrant its use.

With all that said, why would you want to pay extra for this X1950 XTX when compared with other regular units from other manufacturers? Well, the TOXIC is pre-overclocked to 695MHz instead of 650MHz. 45MHz may not seem worthwhile, but it should be noted that the R580 cores don't clock much. Some only reach a maximum of 670MHz before they fail or introduce rendering artifacts on the screen. At around 370 million gates, with a 650MHz frequency, the R580+ is a hot GPU that needs to be cooled quite aggressively. For Sapphire to be able to increase the clock speeds over and above the stipulated standard clocks, as well as still offer a warranty on it, is very impressive.

Operating temperatures at the given 690MHz clocks were a little worrying initially, but when comparing them with the air-cooled variants, it became apparent that the temperatures were well within the normal operating range. In an air-conditioned environment, the TOXIC reported a maximum temperature of 76°C, just after a benchmark. This is a high temperature for any graphics chip and could be considered poor when you consider that this particular unit is water-cooled.

Even at this relatively high temperature, the TOXIC still managed to achieve some impressive numbers, assisted by the massive 64GB/sec memory bandwidth and ATI's ring bus architecture, which helps to extract more performance from a given memory bandwidth than the traditional memory crossbar used by the competition.

Regarding the package contents, Sapphire has included all the utilities and software that are standard with its regular air-cooled versions of the cards. You receive a copy of *The DaVinci Code* game, a driver disk with Catalyst 6.8, media playback disks, VIVO cabling and an instruction manual.

Performance wise, the Radeon X1950 XTX is more than adequate for high-definition gaming on the PC, producing playable framerates at 1,600 x 1,200 with antialiasing at 2, 4 or even 6 samples in the slightly older titles. What makes the graphics card capable of the high resolutions with HDR and antialiasing is the massive memory bandwidth afforded to the graphics core by the Samsung GDDR4 chips operating at 2GHz. As stated earlier, 64GB/sec of bandwidth is enough for bandwidth intensive operations such as HDR and antialiasing. However, it's a pity that super sampling is still not available on the ATI GPUs as, with such a massive bandwidth and efficient memory controller, the performance would likely be satisfactory at 1,280 x 1,024 with 8x SSAA.

What is immediately apparent when enabling post processing features on the X1950 XTX, is that the performance penalty is lower than one would expect. Synthetic scores cannot relate that to a number and one may be convinced that the TOXIC X1950 XTX is not capable at high resolutions, which couldn't be further from the truth. *Serious Sam 2* gameplay was smooth at 1,600 x 1,200 with 6xAA, even though the numbers may suggest an uncomfortable game play, but that is not the case.

There was no title tested on this graphics card that was capable of bringing the TOXIC to its knees. This makes this graphics card one of the few that can claim the capability of playing every single game on the market at 1,600 x 1,200 - and higher - resolutions. As a result, there is little reason why anybody would want to overclock this graphics card other than competition runs in 3DMark and the like, where it would be very difficult to compete without using CrossFire rendering anyway.

As good as the Sapphire TOXIC X1950 XTX is, one cannot help but wonder why this product was introduced so late in the year. As it stands, the competition's next-generation part has made an appearance and is no doubt impressive. The actual timing and pricing of this product can be faulted when compared to a similarly-priced graphics card from the competition. Only a true ATI fan would find value in this product at this point. Even then the R600 is due for release in January or early February, according to rumours, which means this upgrade will be short lived.

The Sapphire TOXIC is a brilliant product that has arrived just too late and priced too high. It will be interesting to see what Sapphire can do with its next TOXIC product, based on the R600. It's sure to be a product worth waiting for. Judging from the quality of this product, Sapphire will not disappoint. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Pros

- High-definition gaming
- Suitable
- Great image quality
- Overclocking friendly

■ Cons

- Late to market
- Water-cooling kit is weak
- High operating temperature

■ Supplier

Esquire 0861 700 000

■ Internet

www.sapphiretech.com

■ RRP

TBA

■ Reviewer

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

■ GPU

ATI R580+

■ Video memory

512MB GDDR4

■ Engine clock

695MHz

■ Memory clock

1GHz (2GHz effective)

■ Bus standard

PCI-E

■ Memory interface

256-bit, 512-bit Ring Bus

■ Output

S-Video

■ TV Output

S-Video

■ Fabricator

TSMC 90nm process

■ DX shader model

SM 3.0

■ Transistors

384 million

■ Basic configuration

(VP, FP, ROP)

8, 48, 16



World Series of Poker: Tournament of Champions 2007

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BIOSTAR TFORCE 965PT

BIOSTAR HAS BEEN A common OEM brand for years now. In the past few months, they've been trying to reinvent themselves as a high-end overclocking and enthusiast market brand. So far, we've seen several boards from them, which were quite impressive and still reasonably priced. We managed to get a hold of their P965-based motherboard in their TForce series, reputedly the enthusiast brand of their product line-up.

Biostar has several 965-based boards, the TForce P965 Deluxe, P965, and 965PT. The Deluxe is the only one with the Intel ICH8R Southbridge, which supports RAID and six SATA ports. The other two merely have four SATA ports, but they're all standard 3Gbps. One thing that is immediately apparent about the 965PT is that it's short. The third row of mounting holes is noticeably absent, and the board only uses six screws to mount into the case. It still supports the standard slot count though, and has one PCI Express x16, one x4, one x1, and three PCI slots. Likewise, the port arrangement is fairly standard: six USB 2.0 on the back plus headers for four more ports; Gigabit Ethernet; six audio jacks, PS/2; and on the board one IDE and a floppy drive port.

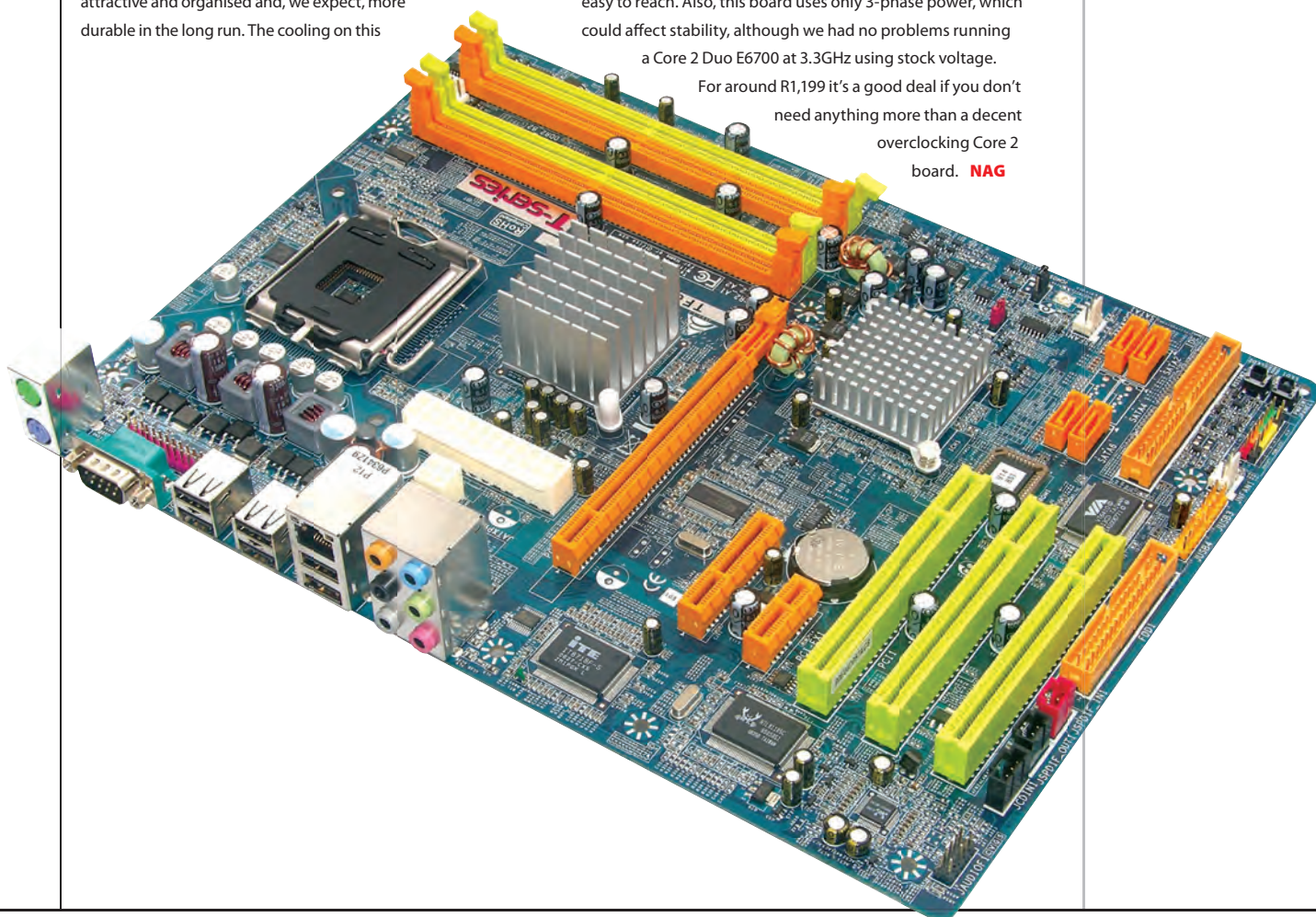
There are also some fairly impressive additional features. The 965PT has power and reset switches on the board, convenient if you're testing a new system and don't feel like fumbling with the front case wires. It also includes the mesh bag we've seen in the previous Biostar T series boards, which is very useful for storing the manual, CDs, and extra cables that come with the board. No need to have a decaying box lying on a shelf, the bag is much more attractive and organised and, we expect, more durable in the long run. The cooling on this

board is passive blocks for both the North and Southbridge chips as no complex heatpipe system is used, so the coolers can be easily replaced with standard 3rd party coolers if you want to aim for a higher overclock.

Speaking of overclocking, we did get some decent results with this board. We managed to get as high as 400MHz on the front side bus before locking up in Windows once it got hot, using Biostar's provided overclocking utility. This has the unfortunate drawback of trying to reapply your last clock speed set before it crashed, unless you manually go hunting through its configuration files. However, it fared quite well and 375MHz was quite stable even with our RAM pushed to 1,125MHz. However, it could do with a bit more flexibility in the BIOS. While Biostar includes manual RAM timings and CPU voltages, there are only about four choices for RAM voltages, instead of the fine gradient most other boards use. It also doesn't support 1,066MHz stock RAM speed out of the box like most other boards these days. It would also be great if it calculated the effective speeds for us on the screen so that we didn't have to work out our target RAM speed with a calculator. On the plus side, it does let you save BIOS settings to 10 custom slots. We tried looking for newer a BIOS to address some of the issues, but found that the version we had was up to date.

We also had a few concerns about the board's physical layout. The power connector is in a particularly bad place between the Northbridge and ports, and the CPU fan header is actually between the DIMM slots. Fortunately, the clear CMOS jumper was easy to reach. Also, this board uses only 3-phase power, which could affect stability, although we had no problems running a Core 2 Duo E6700 at 3.3GHz using stock voltage.

For around R1,199 it's a good deal if you don't need anything more than a decent overclocking Core 2 board. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

Pros

- Good overclocking
- Low cost

Cons

- Poor connector layout
- Minor BIOS issues

Supplier

Sonic Informed [011] 805-0406

Internet

www.vivacafe.co.za

RRP

R1,199

Reviewer

Toby Hudon

SPECS

CPU

LGA775 Pentium 4/Core 2 series

Chipset

Intel P965 + ICH8

Memory

Dual-channel DDR2 667/800MHz, 4 slots

Expansion

3 x PCI, 1 x PCI Express x16, 1 x PCI Express x4, 1 x PCI Express x1

Storage

1 x FDD, 1 x IDE, 4 x SATA 3Gbps

Ports and headers

PS/2, Parallel, Serial, 10 x USB (6 rear, 4 on headers), 8ch audio, front audio

Audio

Realtek ALC883 7.1ch HD audio

LAN

Realtek 8110SC 10/100/1000 Ethernet

Dimensions

ATX form factor 30.5cm x 22.0cm

SONICGEAR APOCOLYPSE A8

THE VARIOUS LEVELS OF audio quality one gets from various speaker manufacturers is quite amazing. The quality of the amplifier, the actual speaker, and even the speaker housing are all factors that determine the sound quality of a speaker.

SonicGear is not a brand you would usually associate with top-quality speakers. Nevertheless, as we unpacked the unit we realised that these were not your average set of desktop speakers. The kit consists of two satellite speakers, a large subwoofer and the amplifier. Each of the satellite speakers are a square-shaped design with a 3-inch 15W driver. The large subwoofer, on the other hand, sports a 6.5-inch woofer rated at 35W.

If you look closely at the round window on the front panel of the amplifier, you should notice a vacuum tube. This particular vacuum tube is used as a pre-amplifier and eliminates the digital noise, as well as enhances the overall sound quality. You will find the treble and bass controls as well as the volume control knob below this.

Even though this speaker set sounds impressive on paper, there is only one way to find out just how good it is. For this test we used the optical input on the speaker to connect it to our PC. Not many motherboards support optical connectivity, so we decided to test these speakers using the composite audio connectors as well. Listening to our test MP3 play list, we immediately noticed the power of these speakers. They are very loud. Initially the sound quality was poor, but after we tweaked the Winamp amplifier things sounded better. Sadly, we were a little disappointed with the limited range from the treble and bass controls. For the duration of our tests we had the bass turned on full, while the treble was turned up about three-quarters. At lower volumes, these speakers sound incredibly crisp and the bass is sufficient for most games and music. For some reason though, as you crank up the volume, the crisp sound seems to distort slightly and the bass loses its impact.

While we cannot argue that these speakers are better than those currently available, we were a little disappointed with the high retail price. If it's loud sound you are after, you will be happy with the Apocalypse A8, but if you simply want a decent set of speakers for music and games, these might be overkill. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Pros

- Loud
- Vacuum tube amplifier

■ Cons

- Sound loses quality at high volume levels
- Price

■ Supplier

Eurobyte [011] 234-0142

■ Internet

www.eurobyte.co.za

■ RRP

R1,999

■ Reviewer

Regardt van der Berg

SPECS

■ Satellites

3-inch 6 ohms 2 x 15W

■ Woofer

Intel P965 + ICH8

■ S/N Ratio

6.5-inch 8 ohms 35W



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MSI P965 PLATINUM

THE MSI P965 PLATINUM is an Intel LGA775 board that supports Pentium 4 and Core 2 Duo/Quadro series CPUs. It uses the 965 chipset, which is Intel's mainstream platform introduced for the Core 2. One thing that immediately stands out is that the MSI P965 Platinum supports ATI's CrossFire system, which is rarely found on 965-based boards. We did test it, and it does indeed work, despite one slot being PCI-E x16 and the other x4.

As for ports, there's the standard complement, but also both optical and coaxial SPDIF, and oddly enough, a serial port. There are also headers on the board for six more USB ports, another FireWire port, and seven SATA 3Gbps - six from Intel Matrix Storage and one from the controller that also provides the single IDE port. The front panel connector is easy to find and for once is clearly labelled, including pin orientation. MSI also ships its D-Bracket 2 with this board, which is a slot cover that has two USB ports and four LEDs, which indicate the motherboard status on boot-up so problems can be diagnosed.

This board stands out in other areas too. It uses passive heatsinks, but not the gigantic maze of heatpipes found on other high-end 965 boards. Some might think this would imply that the board will not have much in the way of overclocking or stability, but this is completely untrue. We were able to achieve a stable 380MHz front side bus, and 3.2GHz on a QX6700 Core 2 Quadro Extreme Edition, using air-cooling. We were also able to POST as high as a 425MHz FSB, but had issues with the SATA drives not detecting. We suspect that serious overclockers will be able to get quite a bit more out of this board merely by replacing the passive sinks with fans or water-cooling systems. Fortunately, due to the lack of heatpipe integration, the sinks are easy to remove and replace with a custom solution. The

BIOS is well organised, especially the overclocking portion. At first we had problems setting the CPU multiplier, but an update to the latest (1.10) BIOS quickly fixed that.

As if that wasn't enough, MSI goes the extra mile too. The BIOS includes a system where, should the system not boot successfully four times in a row, it will undo overclocking settings but leave the rest of the settings intact. It works, not once did we have to use the clear CMOS jumper and reconfigure the BIOS, despite repeated overclocking attempts which resulted in failed boots and even no video. The BIOS also lets you set manual RAM timings, a feature many 965 boards seem to lack for some reason.

We also had a rather interesting experience during testing. One morning when changing graphics cards, we found the +12V CPU power cable disconnected inside the case. Oops. Most boards will refuse to POST and beep or become unstable if you try this. This board ran a quad-core CPU and an 8800GTX playing *Battlefield 2142* for hours the previous night without the slightest complaint. The P965 Platinum's stability, even when improperly connected, is a testament to the quality of engineering MSI has put into this product. Another example would be the Dual Core Cell feature, which combines many motherboard components into a custom chip. This reduces bus noise throughout the system, contributing to stability, and results in some of the best onboard audio we've heard to date. Even with five case fans there's no detectable hum on the audio lines even with professional grade headphones.

All this quality comes at a price. That price is in line with the single graphics slot mid-range boards, or about R500-R1,000 under the premium boards, which may offer you similar performance and features. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros

- CrossFire support
- Legendary stability
- Decent overclocking

Cons

- Will raise your expectations of other motherboards

Supplier

MSI direct

Internet

www.msi.com.tw

RRP

R1,699

Reviewer

Toby Hudon

SPECS

CPU

LGA775 Pentium 4 / Core 2 series

Chipset

Intel P965 + ICH8R

Memory

Dual-channel DDR2
533/667/800/1,066MHz, 4 slots

Expansion

2 x PCI, 2 x PCI Express x16 (one x4 speed), 2 x PCI Express x1

Storage

1 x FDD, 1 x IDE, 7 x SATA 3Gbps + RAID 0/1/5

Ports and headers

PS/2, Parallel, Serial, 10 x USB (4 rear, 6 on headers), FireWire, 1 x FireWire header, 8ch audio, optical + coaxial SPDIF, front audio, diagnostic LED

Audio

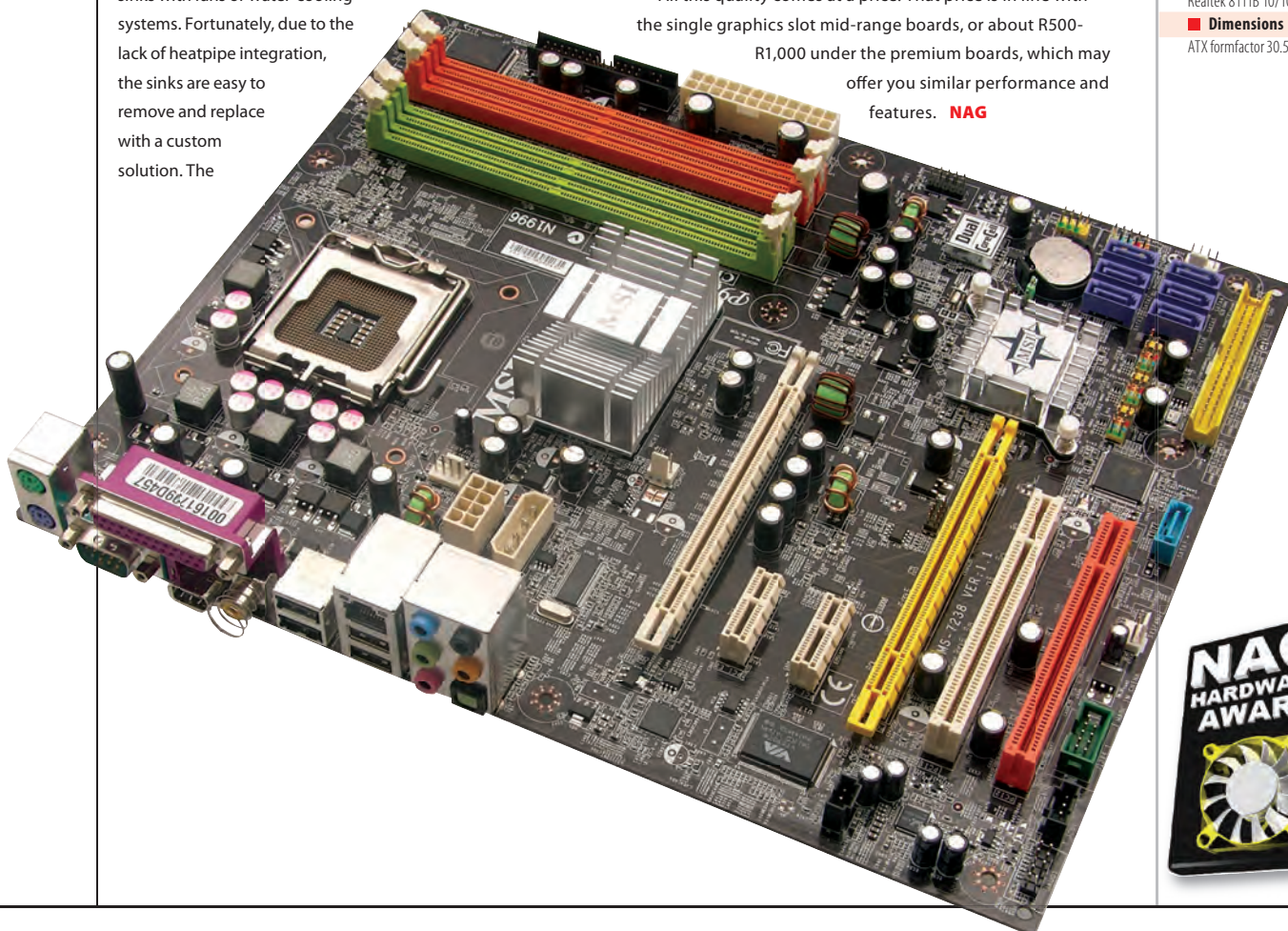
Realtek ALC883 7.1ch HD audio

LAN

Realtek 8111B 10/100/1000 Ethernet

Dimensions

ATX formfactor 30.5cm x 24.5cm



THERMALTAKE SYMPHONY MINI

WATER-COOLING YOUR PC IS an extreme method. It's extreme not only because it manages to keep your system cooler than any air method, it's because, for the most part, it's generally extremely difficult to install. Amongst the hardcore, pre-built liquid cooling systems spell trouble. Concern over outright cooling efficiency is tantamount, as well as the longevity of the components.

The Thermaltake Symphony Mini on test here is one of the easier water-cooling systems. The radiator, reservoir and pump assembly is already complete and integrated into a single, external standalone unit. All you need do is to install the CPU water block. You do have to initially remove the motherboard to allow the fitment of the supporting plate, but that's it.

Calling it 'Mini' is ironic, since the radiator, reservoir and pump assembly is enormous, standing higher than a very large desk. The main reason for this is that the radiator is seated above the pump assembly, with three vertically aligned 120mm fans to cool the liquid passing through. These fans spin so lazily that the Symphony is an almost-silent cooling solution – you can hear the noise of the water being forced through the tubing above the fan noise.

We installed the Symphony on a CPU known to generate a lot of heat. In fact, our P4XE 965, clocked to its default of 3.73GHz per core, idles at 46°C, and under load knocks on the door of 65°C. Water block installed, and the difference is staggering, although initially we weren't particularly impressed with the quality of the block. The surface was clean and smooth, but it just lacked the unbreakable impression of the Swiftech block. However, an idle temp of 29°C pushing up to a max of 43°C under the load of SuperPi for an hour means that the Symphony is not a heavily compromised water solution!

Just beware: should you fit one of these, monitor your chipset temperature closely, as there's no airflow from a CPU HSF to directly modulate this hotspot. Our Gigabyte DQ6 test system required a large room fan aimed at it to keep the chipset cool enough to stabilise the machine, especially once we'd overclocked our CPU to a blistering 4.5GHz. At this point we still hadn't hit a temperature problem on the processor.

The Symphony Mini then is an excellent water-cooling system for the novice, but with enough performance to satisfy even the experienced water cooler. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Pros

- Easy to install
- Quick-seal connectors make it easy to move
- Rather stylish to look at

■ Cons

- Black-painted radiator easy to scratch
- Bracing plate impossible to remove once fitted.

■ Supplier

Corex [011] 707-5000

■ Internet

www.thermaltake.com

■ RRP

R2,150

■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett

SPECS

■ Dimensions

250mm (W) x 250mm (D) x 800mm (H)

■ Weight

9kg

■ Material

All aluminium, copper for the heatsink

■ Maximum capacity

400l/hr

■ Maintenance

Free for liquid refilling, 10,000 hours

■ Cooling system

3 x 1,400rpm ultra-quiet 120mm fans

■ CPU support

Intel P4 Socket 775, P4 Socket 478, AMD K8, AMD K7

■ Features

Radiator: 120mm (W) x 33mm (D) x 360mm (H)

Quick disconnect coupling

Automatic non-spill valves

One-hand operation



The Elder Scrolls IV: Knights of the Nine

Knights of the Nine features an all-new faction and quests for noble characters and answers many of the questions surrounding the Ayleid ruins found throughout Oblivion. Players can join a new faction and found their own order of holy knights - leading them into battle against a sorcerer-king and his demonic minions while exploring massive dungeons and searching for legendary relics - the holy armour and weapons of the Divine Crusader.

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GIGABYTE X1950 PRO

AFTER LITERALLY YEARS OF doggedly swapping the lead with NVIDIA in the high-end graphics card market while the 'Green' company had its way in the high-volume mid-range, ATI recently unveiled a series of new Radeon cards built specifically to plug this gap and bring in some serious competition across the price spectrum. We were keen to see what the X1950 Pro, priced directly against the 7900 GS parts, could offer the high-performance echelon of the mid-range market.

Let's start with the architecture, however. The X1950 Pro is built on an all-new core manufactured using an 80nm process. In fact, it was the first time a GPU has been built using this process. The RV570 core powering this offering is in many ways different from the range-topping RV580+ in X1950 XTxs. Traditionally the company has simply used its old high-end GPUs with lower clocks and has disabled some pipelines to compete in this space.

Clocks are down, of course, with the X1950 Pro mustering a 575MHz core and 256MB of 690MHz (1,380MHz effective) GDDR3 RAM, as opposed to the 1,000MHz GDDR4 RAM on the XT model. It has also lost a few pipelines, with 36 pixel shaders and eight vertex shader units hooked up to 12 ROPs. Compromising compared to its bigger brother, but still well-endowed in comparison with its mortal enemy, the 7900 GS.

In addition to the Zalman VF-700 VGA HSF cooling system, this Gigabyte part also includes a copy of *Call of Juarez* in the package. Installation of the card is a bit strange, as the X1950 Pro is the only card that requires completely separate installation software – it has its own Catalyst distribution.

Where ATI has really scored with this card is the perfection (at last!) of its multi-GPU platform, CrossFire. No longer do you need to mess with annoying dongles for your CrossFire rig to work. Simply plug a connector ribbon between the two SLI-like connectors atop your X1950 Pro cards and you're good to go. Unfortunately, Gigabyte only gave us the one review sample, so

we weren't able to test the hardware in multi-GPU operation this time.

Performance? It's not a high-end screamer, but the X1950 Pro is an all-round solid performer and comfortably eclipses the price-targeted competition in almost every respect. A 3DMark06 score of 4,966 on a Core 2 Duo E6700 machine is just a few points behind the factory-overclocked X1800 XT TOP, from the previous generation of high-end monsters.

For *Battlefield 2142* we used a custom-recorded demo and a cam file built for this purpose and ran several time demos to see just how playable the game could be on this relatively affordable board. At 1,600 x 1,200, with 4x AA turned on, we still managed a playable average of around 40fps. Nominally playable, true, and for the most seamless experience, we'd suggest cracking it down to 1,280 x 1,024. *Company of Heroes*' built-in benchmark still managed to deliver a playable (if not ideal) average of 27.8fps (RTS games don't need the framerates of first-person shooters after all) at 1,600 x 1,200, with all details maxed and 4x AA turned on, on our X1950 Pro test bed. At 1,280 x 1,024 and the same detail settings, the average framerate climbed to 39fps.

All told, the X1950 Pro is the performance equivalent of the old high-end X1800 parts, at a fraction of their cost when they were around. There's the added bonus of support for far greater memory bandwidth, which is very useful for high-res gaming! **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Pros

- Solid performance at an attractive price
- Power and thermal advantages of new 80nm manufacturing process
- Working CrossFire!

■ Cons

- Texture problems in some titles
- Unique Catalyst driver package
- 8800 series in another league

■ Supplier

Rectron [011] 203-1000

■ Internet

www.giga-byte.com

■ RRP

R3,275

■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett

SPECS

■ Graphics processor

ATI RV570

■ Manufacturing technology

TSMC 80nm

■ Number of transistors

330 million

■ Clock frequency

575MHz

■ Graphics memory architecture

256-bit GDDR3/GDDR4

■ RAM frequency

1,380MHz effective

■ Graphics memory size

256MB

■ Bus type

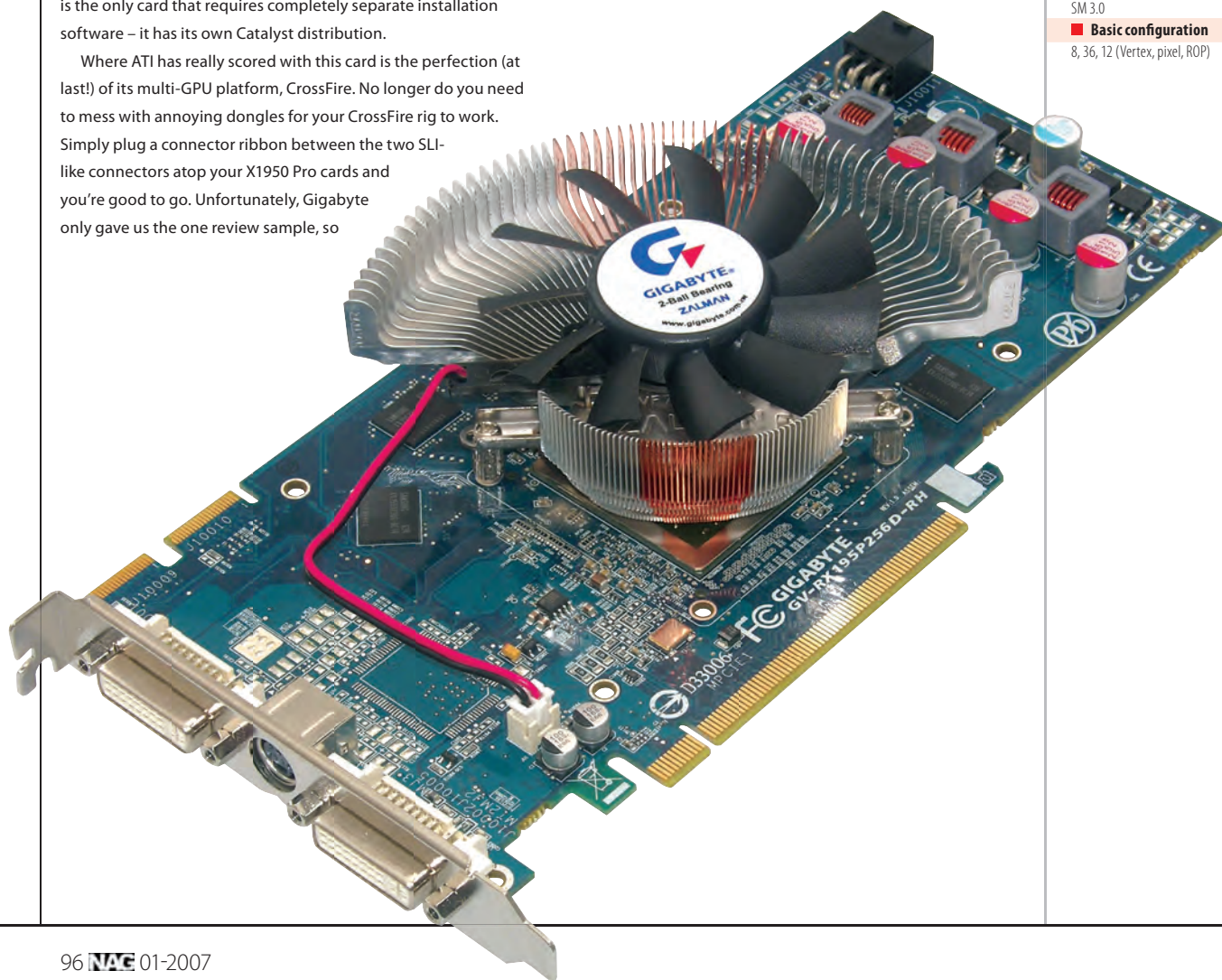
PCI-E

■ DirectX shader model

SM 3.0

■ Basic configuration

8, 36, 12 (Vertex, pixel, ROP)



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H@RDCOR3

WITH THE HYPE OF the Geforce 8 having died down and the impending release of the R600 within a few weeks, many are wondering what they can afford. While it would be great if everybody could buy the high-end graphics cards, the truth is that only a fraction of the discreet graphics card-buying market can afford to spend over R5,000 on a single component. The majority of people will spend less than R1,500 on a graphics card. With that in mind, we set out to try to find graphics cards that fall in this price bracket, but also provide meaningful upgrades for those who may still be using previous generation graphics cards, if not earlier. Within the many graphics cards that we found, some are definite must-haves while others miss the point entirely. However, there isn't a single one that does not outperform its previous generation part. Whichever way you look at it, it is progress, as most of these graphics cards outperform the high-end parts of 2003, but for less than a third of the price of the cost at that time. With 15 graphics cards in this roundup, almost everyone will find what they are looking for.



BUDGET

GRAPHICS CARD ROUNDUP

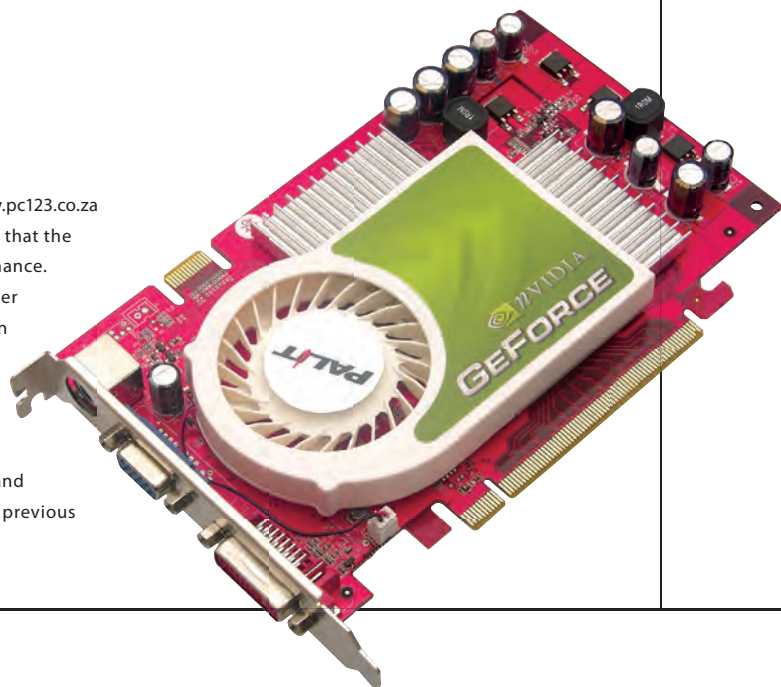
PALIT 7600GT

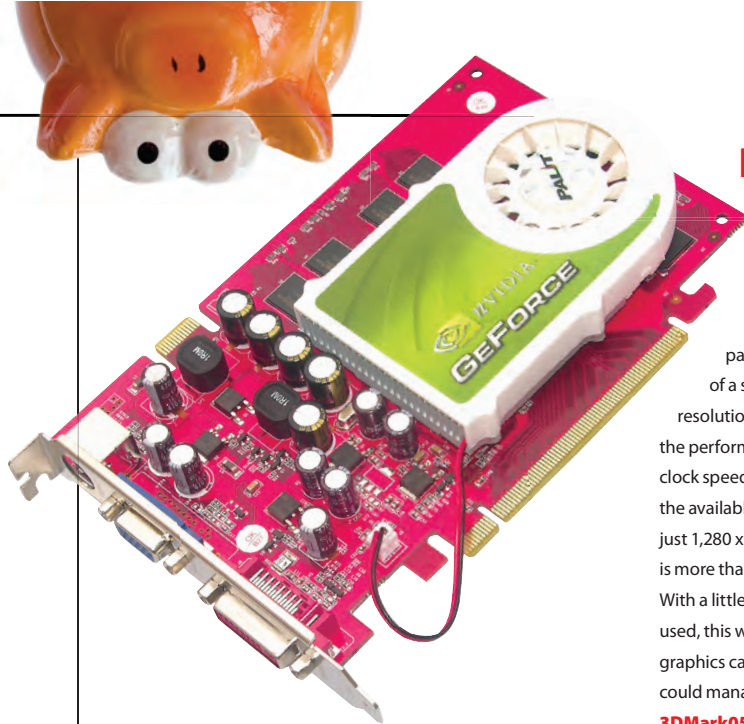
FEATURES: Dual Link DVI, TV-Out, TocaRace3

Price: R1,599 | **Manufacturer:** Palit | **Supplier:** PC123 [011] 791-1971 | **Internet:** www.pc123.co.za

THE PALIT 7600GT IS a no-nonsense graphics card. It doesn't try and convince you that the outward appearance of a graphics card has anything to do with the performance. However, don't let its dull appearance fool you. Besides being one of the cheaper 7600GT cards, it is also the fastest in the roundup, even if only by a small margin compared to the other 7600GT cards. The Palit card also includes everything you would expect in a graphics card these days: a DVI-D-Sub connector, a TV-Out cable, driver CD and Toca3, which, while not a particularly a new game, does make the package that much more attractive, confirming that the Palit 7600GT is one of the better units in this roundup. Great performance and price make this particular card worthwhile especially for those upgrading from previous generation mid-range cards such as the 6600.

3DMark05: 5,374





PALIT 7600GS 256MB

FEATURES: TV-Out, Single DVI, TocaRace3

Price: R1,099 | **Manufacturer:** Palit | **Supplier:** PC123 [011] 791-1971 |

Internet: www.pc123.co.za

THIS IS THE ONLY other card from Palit and, much like its older brother, also features a 7600 GPU. However, this is the cheaper GS and not the fully featured GT. Other than that, the packages are exactly the same, but the 7600GS loses the Dual Link DVI capability in favour of a single link connector. This means you may not be able to take advantage of ultra high resolutions, which are not ideal for this graphics card. However, this is not a problem considering the performance of the 7600GS. While the only difference between the 7600GT's and 7600GS is the clock speed, this difference is evident in the benchmarks and games. One of the most noticeable is the available memory bandwidth. The 7600GS has almost half of the 7600GT which means gaming at just 1,280 x 1,024 is going to prove impossible in the newer titles. However, at 1,024 x 768 the 7600GS is more than capable and should provide adequate performance for those on a very tight budget. With a little overclocking, the card could probably break the 4K barrier, but because of the memory used, this will prove difficult and will require additional cooling. This defeats the point of a low budget graphics card. Nonetheless, should you already have an aftermarket cooler and some RAM sinks, you could manage to clock this card to near 7600GT levels.

3DMark05: 3,734

MSI NX7600GS

FEATURES: HDMI, Dual Link DVI, TV-Out

Price: R1,493 | **Manufacturer:** MSI | **Supplier:** Proton Technology [011] 486-0748 |

Internet: www.msi.com

OF ALL THE GRAPHICS cards we found, MSI is the only manufacturer that features an HDMI connection on a number of its products. This is a key feature, as technically it means that the only Blu-ray and HD DVD content graphics cards here are from MSI. Maybe an oversight on the parts of the other manufacturers, but it is definitely a feature that weighs favourably towards the MSI cards. The NX7600GS is an even cheaper version of the NX7600GT as it is based on the 7600GS core and is clocked much lower than the GT. This card will not set any records nor will it allow you to play any recent title at maximum detail. However, should one keep to the lower resolutions and medium to low detail, the framerates should stay above the 30fps mark. As mentioned earlier, the highlight of this card is the HDMI connection, which makes this perfect for the HTPC market as it supports NVIDIA's PureVideo hardware acceleration and digital set-top boxes. If you don't use your computer to play games, but do watch a lot of high-definition content on a capable display, then you can be sure the NX7600GS will provide more than enough to display full resolution HD.

3DMark05: 3,530



GIGABYTE NX76G 7600GS

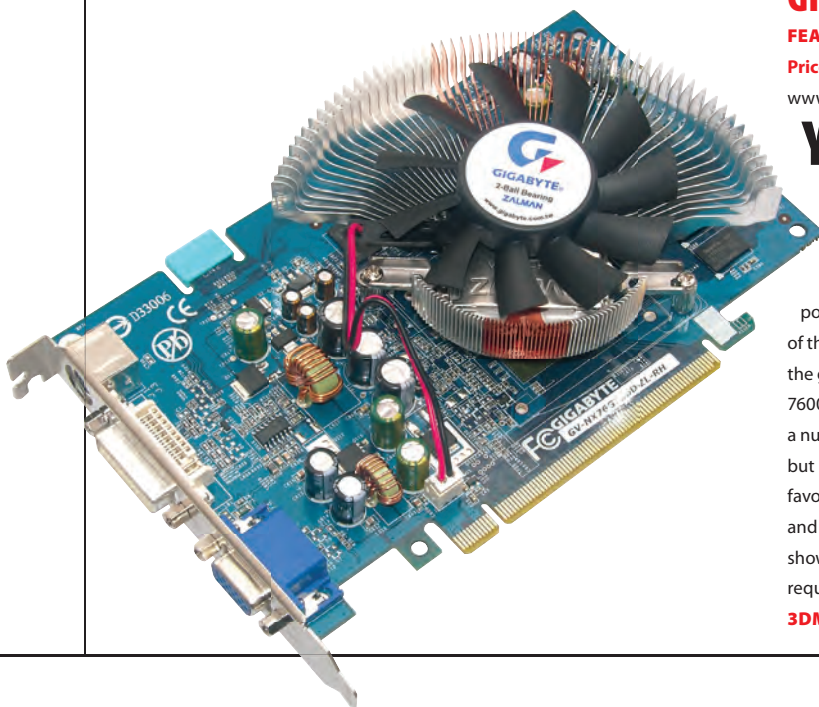
FEATURES: Serious Sam 2, Dual Link DVI, Zalman Cooler, TV-Out

Price: R1,500 | **Manufacturer:** Gigabyte | **Supplier:** Rectron [011] 203-1000 | **Internet:**

www.rectron.co.za

YET ANOTHER 7600GS BASED graphics card but with a difference. First off, it features the cooling expertise of Zalman, which makes this the coolest running GPU and amongst the most silent of those that feature active cooling. Gigabyte has also included a copy of *Serious Sam 2*, making sure that you have something to play once you've purchased the card. *Serious Sam 2* plays well even with HDR enabled, as long as you stick to the lower resolutions with no post processing enabled. What makes the graphics card better value than some of the many 7600GSs featured is that the lower operating temperatures enable the graphics card to operate at higher frequencies, bringing the card closer to 7600GT performance (never quite getting there though). This enables you to play a number of titles at 1,280 x 1,024. Not an easy feat for the cheaper graphics cards, but possible with the Gigabyte NX76GS. Once again, the 3DMark05 score is not favourable, but with a little experimenting one could easily add another 800 points and still have a perfectly stable and cool running graphics card. This is a great showing by the Gigabyte card and one well worth the purchase should the 7600GT require you to part with more money than you are willing to.

3DMark05: 3,733



COLORFUL 7600GS

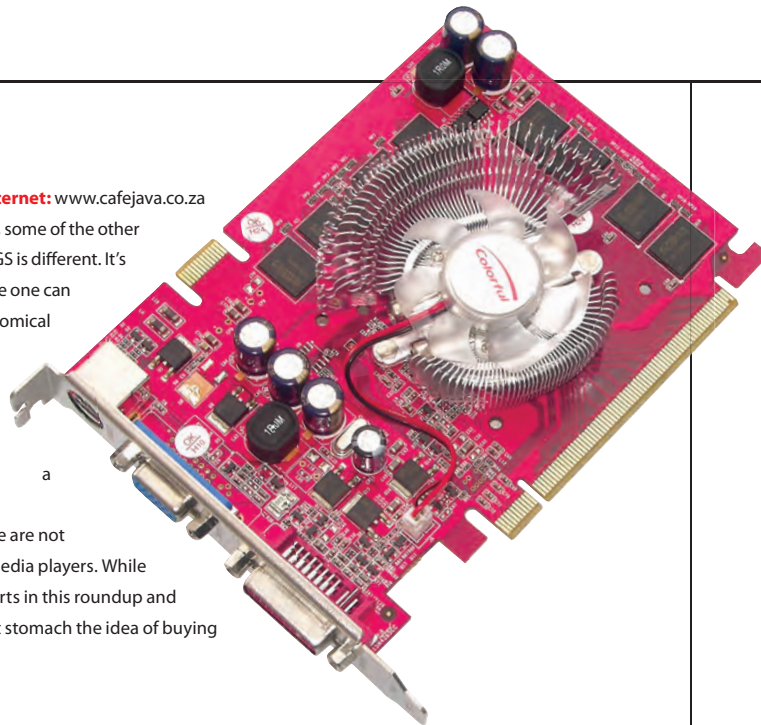
FEATURES: Ear phones, Mini Zalman cooler look-alike

Price: R899 | **Manufacturer:** Colorful | **Supplier:** Sonic Informed [011] 880-2684 | **Internet:** www.cafejava.co.za

COLORFUL SEEMS TO GET better with every successive graphics card it releases. No doubt, some of the other manufacturers featured here have better products overall, but the Colorful 7600GS is different. It's the shortest 7600GS in the roundup (length, not height) so it'll fit into almost any case one can buy. The card features a mini Zalman-like cooler which works rather well despite its comical appearance. Performance wise the Colorful 7600GS is amongst the slowest 7600GS based cards, but this is easily remedied with a little overclocking, which puts it in line with the others. The use of DDR2 on this particular board means that the card does get hotter than one would like, but with adequate airflow in the case it should not be a problem extracting more performance from the memory. This goes a long way to making sure you are not stuck with the low resolutions.

What Colorful can be commended for is the inclusion of in-ear earphones. These are not going to have you replacing your current set, but they are adequate for portable media players. While there are no games, the Colorful 7600GS is cheaper than some of the lower-end parts in this roundup and competes favourably with other 7600GS cards. If you're on a tight budget but can't stomach the idea of buying the entry level cards, the Colorful 7600GS may just be what you are looking for.

3DMark05: 3,555



ASUS EAXX1650XT

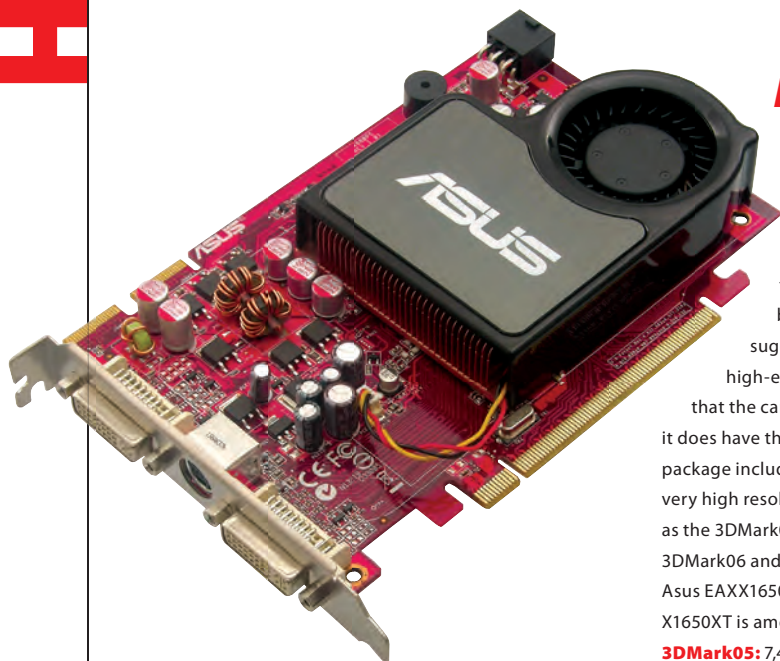
FEATURES: GTI, Dual Link DVI, TV-Out, CD Wallet

Price: TBA | **Manufacturer:** Asus | **Supplier:** Asus SA [011]783-5450 |

Internet: www.asus.com.tw

THE ASUS EAXX1650XT IS based on the ATI RV570 core which makes the EAXX1650XTX amongst the fastest graphics card under R1,500. In fact, it was the second fastest Radeon X1650XT graphics card. The difference between the X1650Pro and the XT is larger than the product name would suggest as the XT is based on the RV560 core. This means it's closer to the high-end X1900XT than the previous mid-range X1600 (RV530). It is worth noting that the card requires a 6-pin PCI-E connector and while it does perform impressively, it does have the highest power requirements in the roundup. As per Asus standards, the package includes a copy of *GTI*, which is based on the Xpand Rally engine, playable at very high resolutions on the card. So it's an ideal show-off for the graphics card. As high as the 3DMark05 result is, one should be aware that the 7600GT is a few points faster in 3DMark06 and, in game performance, the two are evenly matched. Having said that, the Asus EAXX1650XT is an ideal card for those upgrading from X700 or X1600 cards as the X1650XT is amongst the best mid-range parts offered by ATI.

3DMark05: 7,484



MSI RX1650XT

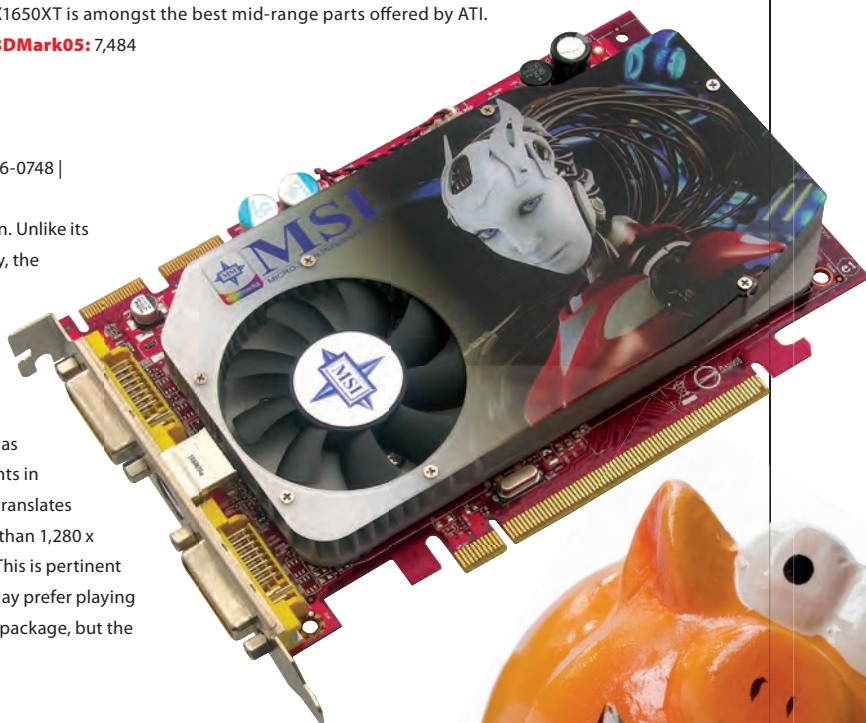
FEATURES: Dual Link DVI, TV-Out

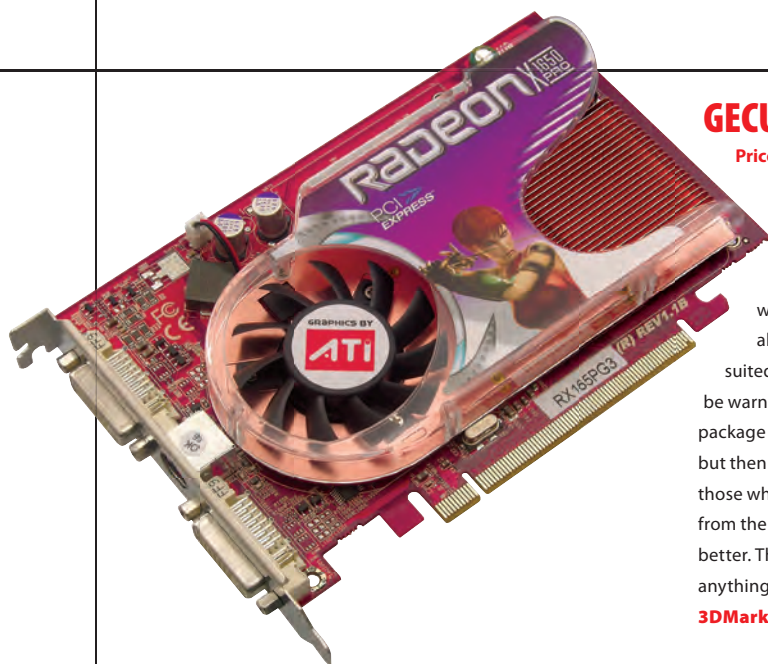
Price: TBA | **Manufacturer:** MSI | **Supplier:** Proton Technology [011]486-0748 |

Internet: www.msi.com

MSI HAS PROVIDED THE fastest graphics card in 3DMark05 in this selection. Unlike its Diamond range, which caters primarily for digital content delivery, the MSI RX1650XT is aimed directly at game performance as it was the highest overclocking graphics card. It would have been great if the RX1650XT package featured some software, but this is not the case and instead you find a driver disk and the mandatory PowerDVD disc. Nothing unexpected and somewhat disappointing, merely the graphics card. Although this should not discourage you from buying it as it does deliver the goods and it was the only card to manage 8,000 points in 3DMark05 when overclocked. The ability to deliver such performance translates into the RX1650XT being the only graphics card that could play higher than 1,280 x 1,024 resolutions in more games than any of the other graphics cards. This is pertinent to those who may be fortunate enough to own a 20" or larger LCD or may prefer playing with AA instead of higher resolutions. MSI has put together a very thin package, but the fastest graphics card on offer here.

3DMark05: 7,501





GECUBE X1650PRO

Price: R1,199 | **Manufacturer:** GeCube | **Supplier:** Sonic Informed [011] 880-2684 |

Internet: www.vivacafe.co.za

WHILE THE X1650PRO IS based on the older chipset than the similarly named X1650XT, it does still provide some descent performance. The GeCube card was particularly speedy, bringing in scores better than those of the 7600GT, which is nothing to snivel at. However, having said that, the in-game performance in all titles doesn't reflect the 3DMark05 results. The X1650Pro's performance is more suited to last generation's 6600GT than the newer parts, despite its high 3DMark score. So be warned that the score is not a true representation of the graphics card capabilities. In this package GeCube do not offer anything more to separate the card from any other X1650Pro, but then again the X1650Pro is priced relatively low and this makes for a viable upgrade for those who are still using previous generation X700 or lower cards. While the X1650Pro is far from the worst card here, it just isn't anything special. For the same price you could do a little better. The inclusion of a game would have sweetened the deal, but unfortunately there isn't anything that separates this from other similarly priced cards.

3DMark05: 5,637

HIS X1650PRO ICEQ

FEATURES: 2 x Dual Link DVI, Dungeon Siege 1.1, TV-Out)

Price: R,1099 | **Manufacturer:** HIS Supplier | **Supplier:** Sonic Informed [011] 880-2684 |

Internet: www.cafejava.co.za

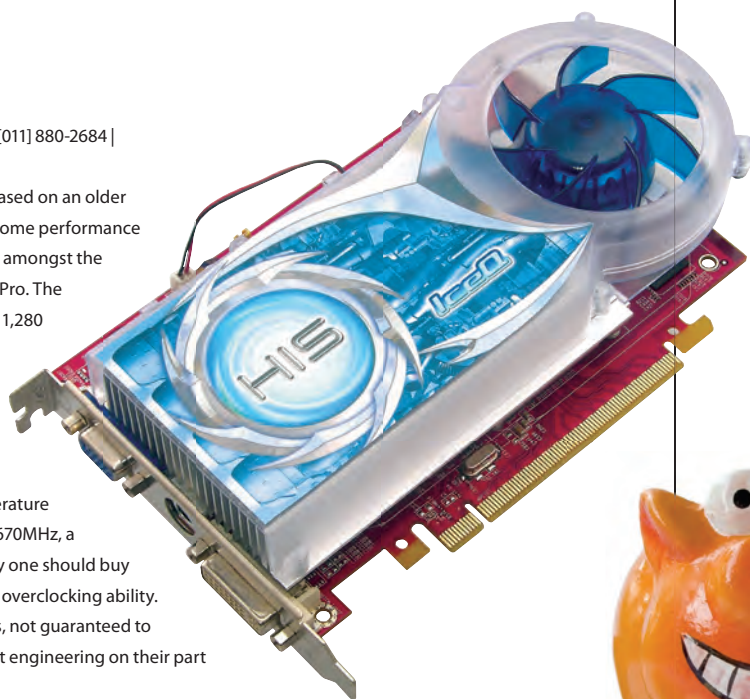
MUCH LIKE THE GECUBE version of the card, the HIS X1650Pro is based on an older chipset. While this is no longer manufactured, it still has some performance head room. HIS thought it useful to include a full copy of, not amongst the latest titles, but it manages to perform very well on the X1650Pro. The graphics card is more than capable of rendering this game at 1,280 x 1,024 with 16xAF, providing a silky smooth framerate.

One of the highlights of the HIS card is the cooler, which is the 2nd most impressive in the entire roundup. Besides its visual appeal, the cooler works very well to keep the HIS version of the card operating at a lower temperature than the GeCube card. This low temperature allowed the card to overclock, impressively reaching a stable 670MHz, a

good 50MHz higher than any other 1650Pro. If there is any reason why one should buy this particular graphics card, it would be for the out the box performance and overclocking ability.

The bundled software also makes this easy without resorting to third-party applications, not guaranteed to work with the card. As with many HIS products, the X1650Pro IceQ is an example of great engineering on their part and well worth the purchase.

3DMark05: 5,801



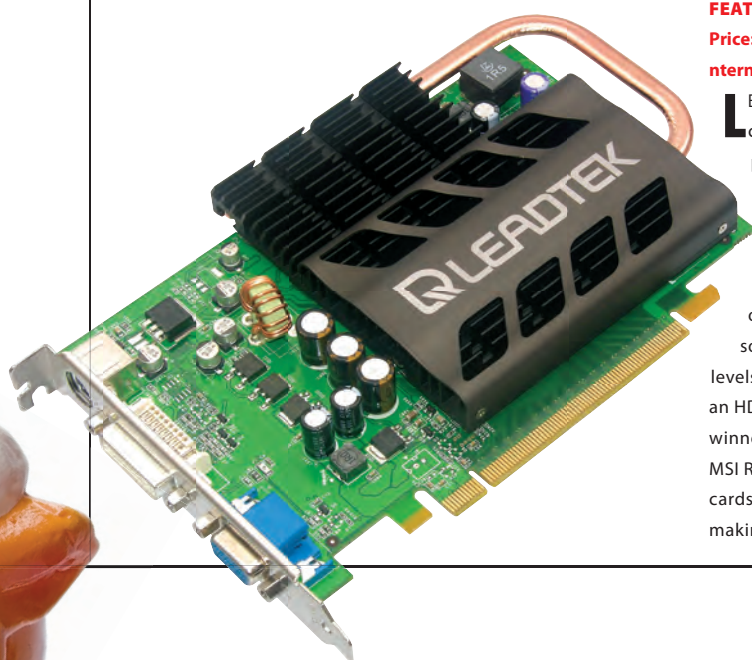
LEADTEK PX7600GS TDH

FEATURES: Trackmania Sunrise SE, Serious Sam 2, Dual Link DVI, TV-Out

Price: R1,789 | **Manufacturer:** Leadtek | **Supplier:** Corex [011] 707-5000 |

Internet: www.corex.co.za

LEADTEK IS NO STRANGER TO NVIDIA GPUs and has been making products based on NVIDIA chipsets since the days of the RivaTNT. As always, they have produced a quality product and the PX7600GS is no different. One of the key features of the Leadtek package is that it is the only graphics card that packages more than one game in the form of *Trackmania Sunrise Special Edition*. This will be appreciated by those who already have a copy of *Serious Sam 2* and would appreciate another title that isn't a demo from 2002 or perhaps some obscure game that only three other people have heard of. Either way, the PX7600GS is another solid 7600GS with some impressive overclocking abilities that allow the card to reach near 7600GT levels. What would have made the card even better would have been the inclusion of an HDMI connector, but this was not the case. For this reason, the PX7600GS is not the winner of any category, but instead it runs a close third to the MSI Diamond Plus and the MSI RX1659XT. If you're in the market for a 7600GS and find that there are just too many cards to choose, the Leadtek will offer more than most and will overclock impressively, making it one of the better mid-range cards out there.



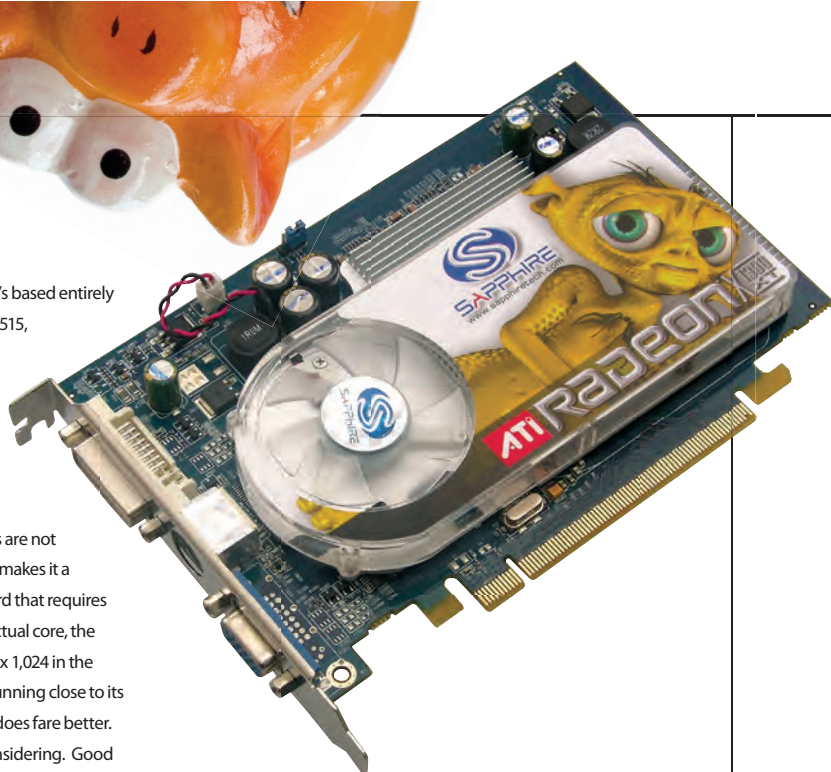
SAPPHIRE RADEON X1300XT

FEATURES: Single Dual Link DVI-TV-out

Price: R1,369 | **Manufacturer:** Sapphire | **Supplier:** Esquire 0861 70 000 |

Internet: www.esquire.co.za/

MUCH LIKE THE X1650XT, the Radeon X1300XT is very different from its Pro variant as it's based entirely on a different core. While it employs the RV530 core, the X1300Pro uses the RV515, which makes it considerably slower than the X1300XT. Actually, the XT was the first graphics card from ATI to feature the X1900XT thread design and in many ways fathered the X1900XT, except that the X1300XT is a more scaled down version in all respects. Featuring a total of 12 pipelines, this is a first for a low-end part and, much like the competing 7300GT, is a step in the right direction. Despite being clocked at a moderate 500MHz, it has some impressive performance at the low to medium resolutions where the limited texturing and data streaming abilities are not much of an issue. The Sapphire Radeon X1300XT is based on an 80nm process that makes it a cooler running part than its weaker X1300/X1300 Pro brethren. This is a graphics card that requires less power, but has far better performance. Despite all the great things about the actual core, the X1300XT is an entry-level card and offers low resolution gaming and possibly 1,280 x 1,024 in the slightly older games like *Doom 3*. As far as overclocking, the X1300XT seems to be running close to its limit as you won't get much more than the standard clock speed, but the memory does fare better. For entry level cards, the X1300XT and its rival are probably the only ones worth considering. Good all round performance from the X1300XT considering the price.



GIGABYTE NX73T 7300GT

FEATURES: Serious Sam 2, Dual Link DVI, TV-Out

Price: R1,200 | **Manufacturer:** Gigabyte | **Supplier:** Rectron [011] 203-1000 |

Internet: www.rectron.co.za

NVIDIA'S G73 CAME IN various guises, one of which is the 7300 range. Instead of the 12 pixel pipelines in the 7600GT, the 7300GT features only eight and one less vertex shader than the 7600GT, as well as other key parts that did not make it into final design. That said, the 7300GT is cheap and does put in far better performance than the previous 5200 and 6200 cards. Overclocking the memory allows the 7300GT to come close to 6600GT performance. While still capable, it's starting to show its age. Surprisingly enough, Gigabyte chose to include a copy of *Serious Sam 2*, which is smooth at 1,024 x 768 without HDR. Unfortunately, a higher resolution drops the framerate too much to consider it playable, but since the 7300 was never made with high resolution and high detail gaming in mind, the 7300GT is a step in the right direction for low-end parts. Do not let the low 3DMark05 score fool you, the 7300GT played all the games at comfortable framerates, provided higher than 1,024 x 768 was not used. For a home theatre PC the 7300GT is more than enough. Even for gamers it should provide those current 6200 owners who are on a strict budget with some performance headroom.

3DMark05: 2,594

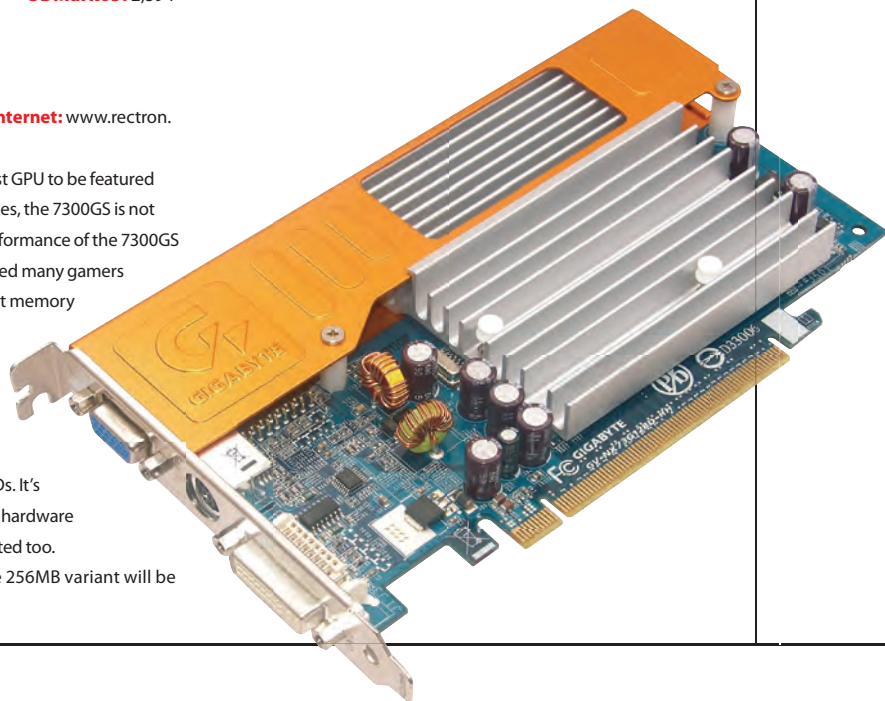
GIGABYTE NX73G 7300GS 128/256MB

FEATURES: Dual Link DVI, TV-Out, Passive Cooler

Price: R780 | **Manufacturer:** Gigabyte | **Supplier:** Rectron [011] 203-1000 | **Internet:** www.rectron.co.za

UNLIKE THE 7300GT, THE 7300GS is based on the G72 core, making it the cheapest GPU to be featured on a discreet graphics card in the GeForce 7 family. With only two pipelines, the 7300GS is not capable of playing most of today's games at reasonable screen sizes. The performance of the 7300GS will remind you of the FX5200, which many discovered was a sham. It frustrated many gamers while on the market. Despite the high core clock, the 7300GS features a 64-bit memory bandwidth and as a result has a lower memory bandwidth than that of 2000's GeForce 2 GTS. Unfortunately, nothing redeems this graphics card and in no way can this be considered an upgrade. The 256MB version is even worse with a slower memory. It makes the entire 7300GS experience frustrating. It's best ignored unless it is to be used for the sole purpose of playing games at 640x480, at minimum to medium detail or watching DVDs. It's also worth noting that the G72, as employed by the 7300GS, doesn't support hardware acceleration of high-definition video playback, so its future in an HTPC is limited too.

If you have to buy a 7300GS, rather purchase the 128MB version as the 256MB variant will be a test of patience in most games under almost all the settings.



Top Performer for nForce 680i

ASUS Striker Extreme Made for Easy DIY and Stylish Gaming



Out of all the nForce 680i/Quad-Core processor boards I've tested recently, the ASUS Striker Extreme of the ROG (Republic of Gamers) series is the one I will recommend. Besides packing feature designed to simplify the DIY process and add style to gaming systems, it is also one of the best performer of the category.

Supporting Nvidia's Quad-SLI technology, and is ready for the new 1,333MHz FSB specification, the Striker Extreme is made for gamers and tweekers to provide the power needed for smooth video and extreme performance.

LCD Poster - Easy System Tweaking with Style

LCD Poster is an excellent feature for system tuning and upgrades. Most hardcore users and engineers install a debug card, which displays a two-digit code that enables them to recognize which part of the system is responsible for hanging the system during boot-up. LCD Poster, located at the back I/O, displays the names of each boot-process instead of using codes. When system hangs due to faulty connection or configuration, the LCD Poster will freeze on the displayed process name that caused the hang up, allowing users to know exactly what needs to be fixed.

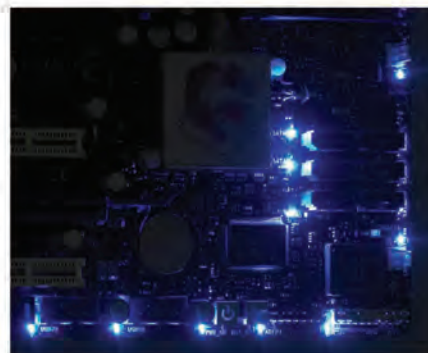


EL I/O and Onboard LED - Easy connection even in the dark

With LAN parties and e-sport tournaments growing in popularity, many gamers and tweekers are finding out that assembling and fine-tuning their computers in the dark environments are quite a hassle.

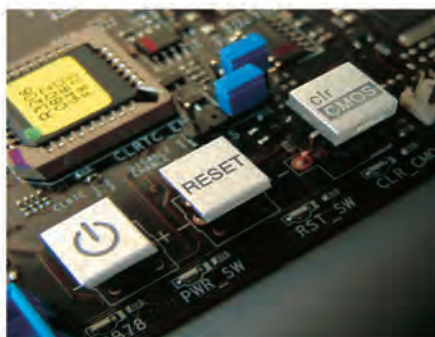
The Striker Extreme incorporated EL I/O,

which simplifies connecting devices by lighting up the back I/O panel for convenient connection in dark environments, meaning no more jamming devices into the wrong connectors. Onboard LED offers strategically placed LEDs to provide illumination to motherboard labels. Users can turn on the LEDs from a switch on the back I/O. This switch also cuts all other circuits on the motherboard except the LEDs to ensure safety during system tweaking. Besides allowing easy DIY, the two features also jazz up a system with cool lightings.



Onboard Switch - Turn system on/off, reset and clear CMOS with 1 push of a button

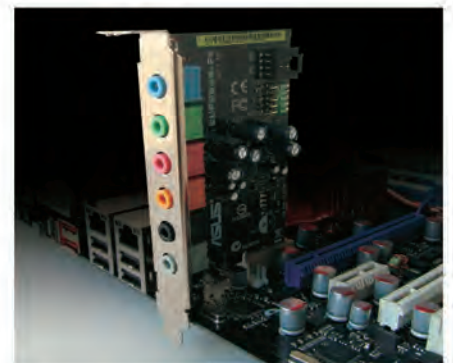
A power user typically builds a system outside of the case. Hence, he needs to short the front panel pins to power up or restart the system, and switch jumpers and pop the battery to clear CMOS. With the Striker Extreme, doing all that is now just a push on the button.



SupremeFX - Great Sounds

The SupremeFX audio card, with 24bit/192kHz sampling in all surround

channels, provides high-quality audio whether it's through headphones or 7.1 surround sound speakers. The bundled array microphone, which comes with background noise filter that detects repetitive and stationary noises (non-voice signals) like computer fans and air conditioners, then eliminates them in the incoming audio stream while recording.



Bundle 3D Games, 3DMark® 06 Advanced Edition, Kaspersky® Anti-Virus

- Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter supports the advanced physics effects and is currently one of the most popular games.
- 3DMark 06 is the most authoritative 3D benchmark used by professionals. It includes advanced SM2.0 and HDR/SM3.0 Shader graphics tests and single, multiple core and multiple processor CPU tests.
- Kaspersky® Anti-Virus Personal offers premium antivirus protection for individuals and home offices. The Kaspersky® Anti-Virus engine is renowned for malicious program detection rates that are among the industry's highest.

Specifications Summary:

- Intel® Quad-core CPU Ready
- Intel® Core™2 Extreme / Core™2 Duo Ready
- NVIDIA nForce® 680i SLI™
- Dual-channel DDR2 800/667/533
- SupremeFX / DTS Connect / Array Mic / Noise Filter
- 10xUSB
- 6xonboard SATA & 2xeSATA
- 2x1394a

MULTIPLAYER

STARCRAFT'S 'GOLDEN MOUSE' FINALLY CLAIMED

ONGAMENET, SOUTH KOREA'S MOST popular televised gaming league has been in operation since 2000. In the years following its inception, the Star League series has become synonymous with professional *StarCraft*, and without exception, all of the celebrated South Korean luminaries have made their names on the *OnGameNet* stage. After the legendary Yo-Hwan 'Slayers_Boxer' Lim won two consecutive Star League seasons in 2001, *OnGameNet* created an award called the Golden Mouse, which would be presented to the player who won three season titles.

Boxer, however, failed to win his third title, though he did participate in several more finals. At the time of his retirement from professional gaming earlier this year, the Golden Mouse remained safely at the *OnGameNet* offices. With fellow two-time winner Dong-Soo 'Garimto' Kim also retired, it left the race for the trophy to the three players who had also won the league twice: WCG 2006 top finishers Yeon-Sung 'IloveOov' Choi and Seong-Jun 'JudyZerg' Park; and the ever-inconsistent Yun-Yeol 'Nada' Lee, who had fallen off the radar after the death of his father.

However, Nada fought his way back in 2006, and on the third weekend of November reached the finals of Star League Shinhan 2. Pitted against the

up-and-coming Young-Jong 'Anytime' Oh, he won 3-2 in maps, claiming the \$40,000 first prize and, more importantly, the prestigious Golden Mouse. His achievement stunned *StarCraft* spectators around the world, who had all but written him off after the string of lackluster performances in 2005.



Yun-Yeol 'Nada' Lee

FOX WINS FIRST MAJOR QUAKE III CHAMPIONSHIP OF 2006

AFTER THE ELECTRONIC SPORTS World Cup Masters tournament in 2005, which was won by Anton 'Cooler' Singov of Russia, *Quake III*'s competitive lifespan had officially come to an end. Taking its place was the latest *Quake* by Raven Software, number four, which met with a mixed reaction from gaming communities worldwide. As a result, a divide arose between players of both games, but *Quake III* players were forced, due to a lack of tournaments for their game, to play the game they disliked. Earlier this year, in an attempt to gain the support of the disenfranchised players, the Cyberathlete Professional League announced that the official game to be played at their tournaments would be *Quake III*. The decision aroused much debate and controversy, but also a great degree of excitement

and speculation. After all, *Quake III* had been the most successful deathmatch game ever released, producing stars like Anton 'Cooler' Singov, the USA's John 'Zero4' Hill and Sweden's Magnus 'Fox' Olsson. The possible return of the old-school heroes kept interest levels high.

The CPL's first major tournament in their *Quake III* World Season was held in Verona, Italy, on 25 November 2006. In terms of attendance, it was not quite what spectators had been hoping for, with only Magnus 'Fox' Olsson, Fan 'Jibo' Zhibo (China) and Yury 'Keeper' Mikulchik (Belarus) returning from the old-school crowd.

Despite the usual last-minute cancellations by several registered players, and the almost-last-minute-cancellation of the entire event, the



tournament eventually got underway. The troubles arose from the regional partner's difficulties in obtaining tournament PCs. After an appeal to the online community, the machines were finally secured, but in order to make up the lost time the tournament was forced to run in single elimination.

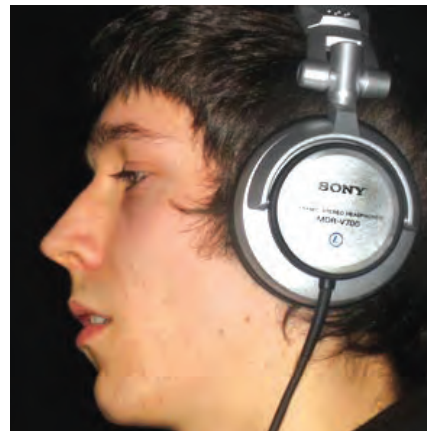
The early rounds saw the departure of all of the Italian contenders, except Vincenzo 'Booms' D'Aurelio, the fifth-place *Painkiller* World Tour finisher. Booms won his place in the quarter-finals by defeating Rafik 'Lost-Cause' Bryant (USA), the rAge 2006 *Quake 4* Champion. Some commentators believe that Lost-Cause's decision to play *Quake III* and *Quake 4* simultaneously is hampering his performance in both games. As such, his top-sixteen finish at this event did not come as a surprise.

In the quarter-finals, Booms was eliminated by Fox, putting an end to the Italian Dream. From the other matches, Germany's Marcel 'Killer' Paul, Fan 'Jibo' Zhibo and Alexey 'Apostol' Altshuller (Russia) advanced to the semi-finals, with the biggest shock being Apostol's victory over Keeper. In the semis, however, Fox had no trouble with the young Russian

dark horse, and won in two comfortable maps. Fox progressed to the final alongside Killer, who had defeated Jibo in a three-map thriller, which went two minutes into overtime on the third map.

The availability of GTV (a client which permits in-game spectating, instead of having to connect to a high-bandwidth video stream) reminded this reporter of the old days of Quakecon and the CPL, where we would all sit up late at night, glued to our monitors, watching the best of the best battle it out. Unfortunately, the scale of the final match of CPL Italy 2006 wasn't as remarkable as those old-time classics, but the excitement had definitely returned in part. It seems certain that without GTV support for *Quake 4*, its predecessor will remain the most popular deathmatch game amongst spectators.

Before the tournament, Fox had stated in an interview with *Gotfrag.com*'s Rod 'Slasher' Breslau that he had only been practising *Quake III* for a week. His venture into *Quake 4* had yielded mostly disappointing results, and after he failed to qualify for the World Series of Video Games finals, he



Anton 'Cooler' Singov

decided to return to his roots. Nevertheless, the lack of practise didn't seem to have affected him, and he overcame Killer in two straight maps (14-11 on *Aerowalk* and 10-6 on *ZTN Tourney*). For his stellar performance, Fox won \$6,000 in cash, as well as travel and accommodation for the CPL World Season Finals.

GRUBBY, MOON IN WARCRAFT III WORLD WAR

WHILE THE SOUTH KOREAN gaming scene has always been dominated by *StarCraft*, its rival *WarCraft III* is currently enjoying a rise in viewership. Spearheading the movement is the MBC televised league and its latest offering, the *WarCraft III World War* – a major international league that follows a unique 'king of the hill'-style format. The format is partly responsible for the widespread interest in the league, although the characteristic lack of replays is still negatively affecting audiences in the West.

The format is as follows. At the beginning of the league the two highest-seeded players face off for the championship title. As the season progresses, a series of challenges takes place between the lower-seeded players, to determine the next contenders for the title. At the end of the season, the qualified player and the defending champion meet to decide the next season's title holder.

The Netherlands' Manuel 'Grubby' Schenkhuizen, who had not yet won a major title in 2006, put an end to his run of second, third and fourth place finishes by thrashing his South Korean opponent, Jae-Wook Lucifer Noh. With the victory, he became the *World War*'s first defending champion. As the season progressed, Tae-Min 'Zacard' Hwang defeated fellow South Korean Tae In 'Rainbow' Kim

in the first round, but was obliterated by Jae-Ho 'Moon' Jang, the Night Elf superstar currently on a month-long winning streak. Moon's next opponent would be France's Yoan 'Tod Merlo', and although Tod took an early lead in maps, Moon bounced back to win the match 3-2.

Moon's victory settled him as next-in-line to challenge Grubby, but unfortunately the Dutchman was forced to forfeit his title due to scheduling conflicts. This leaves Moon as the new defending champion by default. He awaits the second season of the league, which will determine his next challenger.



WOCKING WEBSITES

THE MYSTICAL LAND of the Internet contains much for the hungry gamer who craves information, entertainment or opinion. Because there are millions upon millions of Websites on the vast Information Superhighway, here are a few important sites that you should probably be aware of.

WWW.GAMEHIPPO.COM

If you want free downloadable games, but don't want to spend hours trying each one, then GameHippo is for you. It's an extensive Website with thousands of free downloadable games, each one accompanied by a review and some screenshots so you know what you're getting. The database of games is easy to search and is split into categories and ranked lists, letting you peruse the best (and worst) free downloadable games on offer.

WWW.GAMETAB.COM

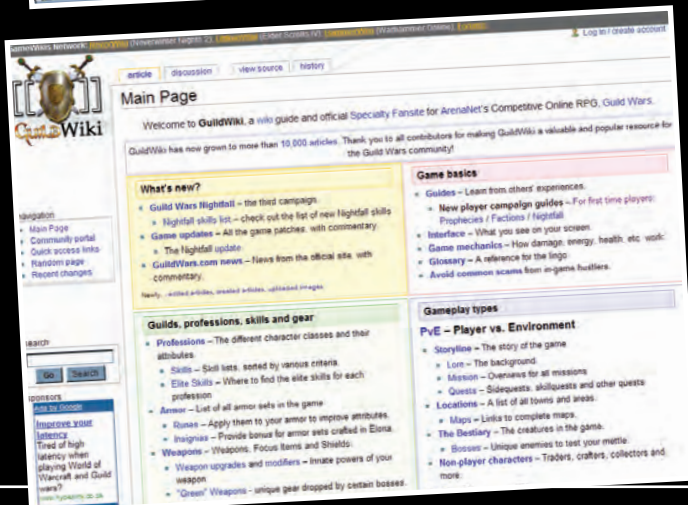
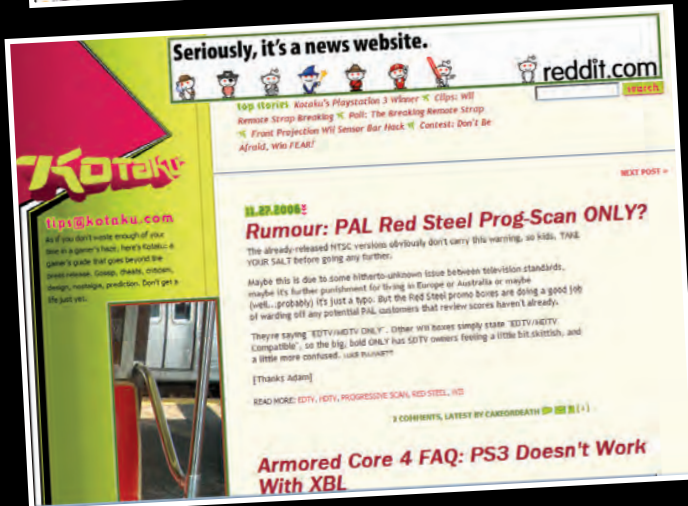
There is just too much gaming information out there, and keeping up to date becomes harder every day. Enter GameTab, a game reviews and news compilation site. It shows you, on a single page, all the news you need to know. The most popular news gets its own space, while the most popular games (in the past 48 hours) are listed. A healthy selection of news sources has their headlines sorted and displayed, and you can even add your own via RSS feeds. If you register with the Website, news is e-mailed to you as it happens, or you will be alerted when there is more news. Essentially, the Website shows you a wonderful snapshot of gaming news and information.

WWW.KOTAKU.COM

If you crave something a little more personal, check out the gaming blog Kotaku. The regular updates on Kotaku read like a *People Magazine* for gaming, keeping you posted on the happenings in and around the industry through sardonic and often sarcastic posts. While Kotaku may not cover all the news (often important tidbits slip past the writers), it covers enough to help you keep up with your favourite pastime. It is your favorite pastime, right? If not, there's always <http://cuteoverload.com>.

GW.GAMEWIKIS.ORG

Those who are obsessed with ArenaNet's 'no-monthly-fee' MMORPG can refer to GuildWiki [gw.GameWikis.org] for any possible question about *Guild Wars* and its various chapter additions. GuildWiki, a community-editable resource, contains information on every skill, class, monster and area within the game, as well as helpful guides for new players. You can research character templates, find out how to capture the Elite Skills, as well as find the armour best suited to your character class in the game. **NAG**



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GOOD VS. EVIL

City of Heroes/City of Villains Combo RRP: R199 **Developer:** Cryptic Studios
Publisher: NCsoft **Supplier:** Megarom [011] 234-2680

IF YOU CAN'T CHOOSE a side, then try both. The recently released *Good vs. Evil Combined Edition* set includes *City of Heroes* and *City of Villains*, the superhero/super-villain MMORPGS with punch. You can be a hero, crushing crime and scratching the spandex itch, or a villain plotting nefarious schemes, kidnapping and not tipping. The *Good vs. Evil Combined Edition* also includes the recent massive expansion update, *Issue 7: Destiny Manifest*, which introduced the new dynamic player-versus-player zones and the one-of-a-kind Mayhem Missions. You also get some exclusive in-game bonus items, along with the Jump Jet Prestige Power, the VIP Card Teleport Power and some exclusive Hero and Villain costumes. Inside the box you'll find a free 30-day trial code and a two-sided map of Paragon City/Rogue Isles. On the disc are the six issues of the Top Cow *City of Heroes* comics. On top of all that, four additional character slots bring the total to twelve slots per server. Both *City of Heroes* and *City of Villains* are pay-per-month MMOs, at around R110 (time cards are available locally), but you only pay once to have access to both games, thanks to the single-fee setup.



PIRATES OF THE BURNING SEA

Homepage: <http://www.burningsea.com/> **Release:** est. 2007

BACK IN THE 18th century, you didn't venture out into the high seas alone. Dubiously short treaties and knee-jerk declarations of war lead to armadas of powerful British, French and Spanish navies duking it out for control of lucrative maritime trade. Merchant vessels without protection were food for pirates, especially in the Caribbean where exotic goods and notorious pirates went hand-in-hook. *Pirates of the Burning Sea* is an ambitious upcoming MMO that aims to capture all this, allowing players to captain their own ship as a pirate, adventurer or naval officer. Highly customisable avatars allow for ample dashery and silk-scarves. You can conquer ports and take on missions. The missions become an ongoing saga as your character develops. You may even find a randomly-assigned arch-nemesis in the game world, intent on ruining your day. *Pirates of the Burning Sea* has been in development since 2002 and Beta testing began recently. As an MMO, it hopes to raise the bar in a few areas, especially with its Naval Combat and PvP-conquerable world. Ship combat aims to have all the action and tactical intensity of a single-player game, according to the developers. As captain, you'll have to balance crew health, sail integrity, hull armour, gun reload speed and manoeuvrability. As the world gets conquered by the PvP factions, more PvE missions unlock, allowing for supply smuggling behind enemy lines or raids on fortifications. Scheduled PvP battles are set to culminate in a final conflict to conquer a port or save it.





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COMPETITION 10 RECAP

FEW THINGS GET PEOPLE MOTIVATED LIKE THE PROMISE OF PHAT LEWTS. NAG KNOWS THIS, WHICH IS WHY IT SPONSORED R10,000 FOR GAME.DEV'S 10TH COMPETITION - THEY FELT IT WAS A SPECIAL NUMBER. GIVEN THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE PRIZE MONEY UP FOR GRABS, IT WAS ALSO DECIDED TO DOUBLE THE STANDARD THAT ENTRANTS WOULD HAVE TO DEVELOP A GAME. THE FACT THAT THIS PRIZE-GIVING LINED UP NEATLY WITH RAGE WAS MERELY COINCIDENCE!

THE CHALLENGE:

Each of the previous nine competitions focused on a single aspect of gaming or game development in an attempt to introduce would-be developers to the complexities of their chosen field in as friendly a way as possible. Unfortunately this created a problem with Comp 10. The cash and extra publicity were expected to bring in a large amount of new and inexperienced people, and we'd already done the typical 'easy' competition topics: retro remakes, arcade/action games, turn-based puzzle games, and even theme-restricted competitions had been done before.

Thankfully, that's when we remembered a genre that features in everyone's favourite games list somewhere, but seems to have fallen by the wayside in the current triple-A market: management games. Theoretically, management is a less demanding genre, requiring less in terms of graphics and sheer programming ability, and more overall design and systems thinking. In reality, we soon found out that it was often rather difficult to define exactly what a 'management game' really meant. In the end, consensus settled on: "A management game focuses on the user affecting or controlling systems that change the state of the game indirectly, without having direct control over a single avatar or collection of avatars." Essentially this meant that, if you had a character that could jump and move around according to the arrow keys, it wasn't a management game. Thankfully, most things could be turned into management games with a little abstraction and good design. With a whole community constantly providing feedback and comments, everyone was set straight rather quickly.

THE COMPETITION ITSELF:

Two months is a long time. At least, it feels like a long time at the outset. However, despite the longer development period, we still had a huge number of entrants only starting to enter in the last few weeks of the competition. A couple of desperate and stressed out developers even started calling NAG to try and make sure their entries had been downloaded successfully. As soon as there's money to be made, everyone goes crazy. Of course, with rAge looming (and the Game.Dev activities planned for that), it wasn't only entrants that were swamped. However, the judges did manage to pick deserving:

BEST NEW ENTRANT: HOTEL MANAGER

By Mark "DarthPenguin" Dennison and Dominic "CiNiMoD" Lennon

A fully item-driven tribute to games like *Theme Hospital* is the very impressive first-foray into Game Maker. This from a couple of guys that didn't have the benefit of being able to ask for much feedback/help from the forum community. Having never entered a Game.Dev competition before, neither of these young developers had much experience in creating a game. They made up for this with talent. *Hotel Manager* has loads of promise. Starting from a well understood management idea, it's set in a great environment for the type of game it is, and the interface suits the gameplay. DarthPenguin and CiNiMoD certainly have enthusiasm, as their developer diary (an almost-Easter-egg) shows. Although next time, we suggest leaving out the 'wet dreams'. Too much laughing could kill Miktar and who will make coffee then?

THIRD PLACE: CYBERWORKZ

By Andrew "kRush" Smit and Geoff "Geometrix" Burrows

Cyberworkz focuses on managing resources in the form of individual employees and items that these employees need to do their jobs. Building a streamlined office isn't easy though, as each person you hire has a specific role to fill, as well as various wants and needs that have to be met. So you might be hiring another programmer to get you through a tough deadline, but if his cubicle is too far away from a source of food (like the hotdog stand or a vending machine), and in the opposite direction of the testing station that he's submitting finished code to, he'll spend a lot of time walking around instead of working. This means he's wasting time on a project he should be working on, so that you can get it to testing. Perhaps it's time to call an office meeting about employee salaries?

Plenty of humour is visible in the way the game works: employees have little thought bubbles with pithy one-liners; management does little besides walk around wearing silly hats; and you can't help but laugh at the cartoony little buggers as they wander from goal to goal.



Hotel Manager in action

Tiny employees in Cyberworkz



That said, the control scheme does need a little bit of tweaking to make it transparent to the player. The ability to order 'peeps' to perform various tasks makes sense, but why can't we tell them to go and have a hotdog while they're over on that side of the office? There's a slight gap in terms of feedback and player action, which needs to be closed. As soon as that's done and the game receives a layer of polish and more levels, we're hoping to see it make a splash internationally.

Interestingly enough, kRush started working on *Cyberworkz* alone. Geometrix saw the game on the Game.Dev forum and simply started giving kRush artwork. Eventually they were working together, having never met face to face until rAge!

SECOND PLACE: FANTASY LAND

By William "Cairnswm" Cairns

We had very few turn-based management games submitted for the competition. This seems mildly strange when you consider how tricky balancing a real-time management simulation can be. There's always the issue of timing. *Fantasy Land* gets around this with a turn-based economy that you affect by constructing various buildings in the limited available slots in your village. This creates scope for decisions on which buildings to use and can lead to some interesting dilemmas for the player to solve on his way to creating a positive cash flow.

However, proper management of your buildings (which becomes easier when you realise that right-clicking on them, in both the build-menu and the game screen, shows how much they cost and what they bring in), is only a section of the game. You have to manage heroes too: paying them to patrol the borders of your kingdom; scout out threats; and venture on epic quests. So, the more heroes you have, the better your economy needs to be to support both them and the taxes you need to pay to the king. Heroes and quests introduce a lot of humour into the game: being able to hire a pizza boy or Santa Claus, alongside the more traditional knights, guards and witches, is rather amusing. Add to this the randomly generated quests, and the game shows itself as something special. When it was initially loaded up for judging, nearly an hour went by before we realised it.

FIRST PLACE: FAST FOOD IN SPACE

By Cadyn "Evil Toaster" Bridgman

FFS steamed ahead and took this competition as soon as it made its players laugh. Everyone who saw the game (both pre- and post-rAge) remarked on how well it worked as a package. Evil Toaster definitely brought a level of polish and sheer humour to the competition that has rarely been matched in the past, and

Decisions, decisions. Hire another pizza boy or build more farms?



never before in the same game.

The idea of managing a fast food empire in space is fertile ground for creativity, but somehow *FFS* manages to have more ideas and jokes per square inch of screen space than previously thought possible. Coupled with such attention to detail, is a management mechanic that makes a lot of sense: periodic 'upkeep payments' (represented by a bar that slowly fills up as the payment is due), and purchases are the only drain on your resources as you sell happy meals to aliens. Taking the risk of upgrading your empire, increasing the effectiveness of your restaurants, or even buying a supply of Viagra for your host-planet, comes at a cost. This entails increased upkeep and will affect how much you pollute, as well as your overall reputation.

There are a lot of stats in the game, all of which are visible by selecting the appropriate planet/spaceship/restaurant/utility building/etc. The great part is that it doesn't degenerate into a quagmire of trying to change all these stats. Instead, you balance three or four inter-related quantities, which then cascade out and change small things all over the place. The simulation is rich and complex, but it's not difficult to get into, nor does it get involved and confusing the further you proceed. Quite the opposite in fact: you have these "Aha!" moments as you're playing, and realise how to make something more effective. This, in turn, both simplifies staying solvent, and complicates your long-term choices. That's the sign of a good management game.

FINAL WORD:

They have already received praise aplenty on the forums. However, once again, congratulations to all the winners and those who entered games into the competition. Every new game is a step forward for local game development, and it feels really good to be able to encourage those steps by handing out giant cheques! Rumours have already started about possible publisher deals regarding some of the competition winners. With the potential that we have here, in South Africa, this is just the tip of the iceberg. **NAG**

An MSG peddling space empire. Bring me more meat substitute!



THE OMEN

Cast: Julia Stiles, Mia Farrow, Liev Schreiber

Director: John Moore

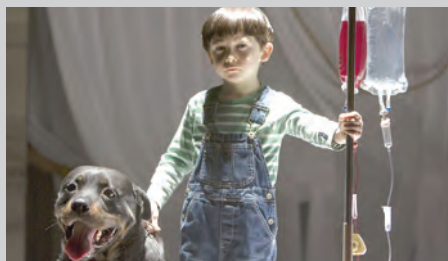
Genre: Horror

Rating: 16V

DAMIAN RETURNS IN A remake of the original movie, where a powerful US politician ends up raising the Antichrist. When the child turns six, weird things start to happen and the politician and a freelance photographer dig up the real story.

The Movie: The problem with high budget horrors is that they are very slick with no horror value. *The Omen* has a few great gore scenes and no expense has been spared on the special effects. However, it has no fright value, especially with Damien looking like he's on Retalin. The most ironic is that the devil's minions appear to be as useless as the people trying to avert disaster.

The DVD: Trailers, features and



commentary, as well as a making-of and some crackpot documentary about the meaning of 666, which the producers didn't bother to watch either.

THE GREMLINS COLLECTION

Cast: Zach Galligan, Phoebe Cates

Director: Joe Dante

Genre: Horror

Rating: 15

A TRAVELLING SALESMAN BUYS A mysterious creature from a Chinese merchant, under the strict instructions to keep it out of light and keep it dry, and not to feed it after midnight. What happens when you do the last two? Your town gets overrun by Gremlins!

The Movie: In the late eighties and early nineties there were a slate of comedy monster horrors that have etched a place in pop culture, such as *Critters* and *Tremors*. But the crown belongs to the Gremlins movies. This box set brings both of them together at a great price. It's worth every cent, and the movies have aged well, being great examples of stop-motion and animatronic animation.

The DVD: The first movie has no special features at all, which is disappointing, but



the second has a behind-the-scenes feature, commentary and deleted scenes.



DOMINO

Genre: Action

Rating: 16LV

Domino Harvey was a legendary bounty hunter who, using her stunning looks and lack of fear, helped track down dangerous criminals in Los Angeles. Sadly, she died just before the movie's release, though this might have been a blessing in disguise. Domino smacks of *Natural Born Killers* – you'll either love it or hate it. We hated it, because as a movie Domino thinks it is so cool, but it forgets to stop acting cool and takes serious liberties with the real story. The visual style is nice, but Tony Scott is watching far too much MTV.

The DVD: Commentary, deleted scenes, Tony Scott justifying this mess and a doc on the real Domino Harvey, which we found more entertaining than the movie.



PULP FICTION COLLECTOR'S EDITION

Genre: Crime

Rating: 18

There is very little reason to try and justify why you should own *Pulp Fiction*, a must-own for any movie buff. The movie that elevated Quentin Tarantino into the big time also revived the careers of John Travolta and Bruce Willis, not to mention jump-started Samuel L. Jackson's own big-screen success. The movie follows various stories of characters in the Los Angeles crime underworld as they go about their business taking drugs, sorting out corrupt business partners and having \$5 shakes.

The DVD: This 2-disc set contains a lot of extra material from the movie, including four deleted scenes, trailers, posters, stills, interviews and more. Unfortunately Tarantino didn't provide any audio commentary for the movie.



Spawn Godslayer

Format: Graphic Novel

Publisher: Image

Writer: Brian Holguin

Artis: Anacleto/Medina/Haberlin

Retail Price: R69.95

SPAWN GODSLAYER TELLS A 'what if' story, keeping the basic concept from the original Spawn, but moving it to a different world where there is not one god, but many, and heaven and hell do not exist. In this world Spawn is a hunter and destroyer of gods, but the key elements of doomed love and damnation, which brought about his curse, remain the same. This once-off graphic novel story collects some truly amazing artwork, and some of the design sketches too. If you're a Spawn fan, or fantasy art lover, this one is for you.

Wisdom #1 of 6

Format: Comic Mini-Series | **Publisher:** Marvel (Max) | **Writer:** Paul Cornell |

Artist: Trevor Hairsine | **Retail Price:** R26.95

MEET PETER WISDOM, INTELLIGENCE officer for MI-13, and his team of specialist agents, as they travel to Otherworld to prevent a war between Britain and fairy-kind. Sound a little over the top? Well, that's just the start, and things just get a lot stranger from there. Marvel Max comics are known for their explicit content, so keep that in mind even though it's about fairies. We're talking shredding fairy folk with Flechett Cannons here. It's kind of funny in an off-the-wall, weird sort of way. Just when you thought you had read everything.



Gen 13 (Volume 4) #1

Format: Comic Series | **Publisher:** Wildstorm | **Writer:** Gail Simone | **Artist:** Talent Caldwell

Retail Price: R26.95

IN KEEPING WITH VARIOUS other Wildstorm titles that are receiving a facelift in the World Storm comic event, Gen13 makes an appearance with a fresh creative team and a new beginning. This issue sees the five main characters come together, explaining a bit about their backgrounds, and giving only a hint at the dark events that await them. The comic is put together well, with upbeat artwork and an easy-to-read story. It promises to be an entertaining series.



Onimusha: Night of Genesis

Format: Manga | **Publisher:** Udon | **Writer / Artist:** Mitsuru Ohsaki | **Retail Price:** R119.95

O NIMUSHA: NIGHT OF GENESIS is the official tie-in to the popular videogame series, and tells the tale of two Onimusha warriors: one on a quest to overthrow an evil warlord; the other becomes the most powerful swordsman of her clan and must seek revenge on a traitor. The story is entertaining, with a detailed plot and nicely illustrated action scenes.



THE RAVEN'S LOFT

To BOLDLY GO...

AS STATED IN MY inaugural article, this column is dedicated to alternative game types, predominantly those not using a computer. This month, we take a look at the *Star Trek Customizable Card Game*. Given that, I am no expert on this game, I have asked STCCG veteran Owen Swart to give us a primer. Without further ado, over to Owen...

Although *Star Trek CCG* has been around for some time (the original Premier set was released in 1994), it has never had a large following in South Africa. It's therefore reasonable to assume that the average NAG reader has never played the game. So, in the interest of getting everyone up to speed, I present: 'The n00b's Guide to *Star Trek CCG*'.

In STCCG there are seven card types:

Personnel - The people of the *Star Trek* universe. This includes everyone from Captain James T. Kirk all the way down to any given 'alien of the week';

Missions - The places of the *Star Trek* universe: the planets, stations and anomaly-riddled space in between. (They come in three varieties: Headquarters, Planet and Space.)

Ships - The mighty vessels of *Trek* used for moving your Personnel from one Mission to the next.

Dilemmas - The problems and obstacles that get in the way of our heroes completing their Missions. **Events**, **Interrupts** and **Equipment** - optional cards used to

enhance your game or slow your opponent's.

The objective is to score 100 points and to have completed at least one Space Mission and one Planet Mission. Missions are completed by matching up the skills and attributes of your Personnel with the skills and attributes required by the Mission. When you do the Mission is complete and you score the valid points.

Sounds easy, doesn't it? Well, it's never quite that simple. When attempting a Mission, your opponent chooses a number of Dilemma cards for your crew or away team to face, before they are allowed to meet the Mission requirements. If you fail to overcome the Dilemmas, or you lose too many Personnel along the way, the Mission attempt will fail and you'll have to start again next turn.

And it gets more complicated. Personnel and Ships are divided into a number of affiliations: the slick and straightforward Federation; the battle-hungry Klingons and Dominion; the sneaky Romulans and Ferengi; and the ever-present Borg, who want nothing more than to assimilate everyone else's Personnel. Each affiliation has its own unique flavour with specific strategies from which to choose, and even mix and match.

Despite the ease with which new players can learn the basics of the game, the layers of complexity and strategy make STCCG a challenging and stimulating experience that is inescapably addictive. The depth of the strategy and the conversational nature of the



gameplay make the STCCG playing community a social and friendly environment. This has proven enough to coax a number of *Magic* players away from the sometimes intimidating competitive MTG tournament circuit.

People who would like to find out more about this game and its active community can visit <http://startrekccg.fanhq.com/>.

SCRYING THE SYNERGIES

This month we take a look at a very aggressive little critter: *Vinelasher Kudzu*. This two-mana green plant grows with each new land you put into play. Now, while it is perfectly acceptable to fatten it up the regular way of playing lands, there are other quick ways to boost it. *Terramorphic Expanse* will put a counter on the Kudzu when you play it normally, but you will also get another counter when you sacrifice the Expanse and fetch another land. This is true for any other kind of land acceleration, such as *Silkwing Scout*, *Perilous Forays* or *Rampant Growth*. The Kudzu also loves the *Ravnica Block* 'bounce lands'. Firstly, these lands require you to return another land to your hand, so ensure an additional land drop (and, consequently, an extra counter for the *Vinelasher*). There is another trick you can use: you can play the bounce land to return it - this way, you can assure a counter for the *Vinelasher Kudzu* at every turn.



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WAR OF THE CONSOLES

Part 3

In our final part of this series, we'll finish our look at the history of consoles. Once we reach the present, we can take what we've learned and see what predictions we can make about the future of this new generation. Home gaming has gone through quite a few generations at this point. As we enter the late 90s, it begins the transition from adolescence into maturity as gaming moves out of the domain of geeks and kids and into the mainstream.

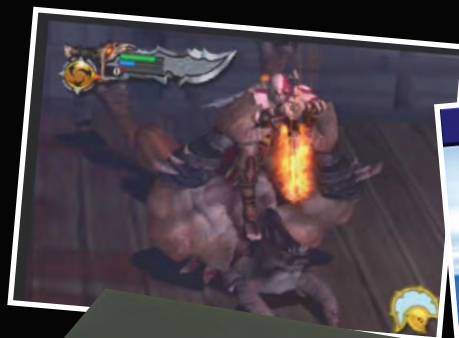
ROUND 5: TO DREAM THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

The late 90s caused a huge shakeup in the console game industry. Sony went from being an "Are you kidding me?" unknown, to the dominant force. Sony's aggressive marketing and courting of developers left established players, Sega and Nintendo, reeling. Atari and 3DO abandoned the hardware market, never to return. However, Sega was not about to let Sony have it all without a fight.

In 1998, almost a year ahead of schedule, Sega announced the release of its new console, the Dreamcast. Since Saturn was so expensive to produce, Sega was unable to keep pace with price cuts from Sony and Nintendo, and instead pushed development on its next-generation of hardware. Sega learned from its previous mistakes with Saturn, and licensed Windows CE from Microsoft so that Dreamcast would be easy for PC developers to port games. Unfortunately, Windows CE had a heavy performance penalty on the hardware, so many games that used it had performance problems. In the end, it was Sony's early announcement of the PlayStation 2, almost a year before it would ship, that caused the Dreamcast to fail. Despite extremely advanced hardware and features, Sony's announcement was made just after the Japanese DC launch and before its US debut, taking the wind out of the Dreamcast's sails and eventually forcing Sega out of the hardware business to focus exclusively on software for good.

Sony launched the PlayStation 2 amid much fanfare in 2000, and seemed to be untouchable in the console market. Backwards compatibility guaranteed a huge software base from the PlayStation 1 market. Despite an inferior graphics chip with a limited amount of RAM, the PS2 was able to push ahead of its competitors with ease. Sega was out of the race, and Nintendo seemed to be less and less concerned with what gamers wanted, and increasingly focused on a younger niche market using its licensed characters in yet more sequels. Nintendo's GameCube was not a bad system, and packed a large amount of power in a very small package. However, developers were tired of Nintendo's narrow focus and most stayed with Sony, despite any advantages that Nintendo's hardware had.

Then something interesting happened. Microsoft announced that it would enter the console market with the Xbox - a console based on industry standard PC hardware running a version of Windows. Suddenly developers were interested in the possibility of easily porting games to and from the PC, and Microsoft's high-powered hardware and unique features, such as an



internal hard drive, generated a lot of buzz. The console had a shaky start, but then, as titles like *Halo* appeared, it started to gain attention. Microsoft eventually launched its Xbox Live service so that gamers could play games online for a very modest annual fee, which covered all games supported by Live, using the built-in Ethernet adapter to connect to a broadband Internet account. Live became a success, and while Sony had some limited support for online gaming via a separate broadband adapter upgrade, Nintendo outright ignored the online market. By 2005, Microsoft had passed Nintendo and assumed second place, although Sony had a very large lead, and Microsoft still had difficulty penetrating certain markets like Japan.



GAMECUBE



XBOX



RANKINGS	DREAMCAST	PLAYSTATION 2	GAMECUBE	XBOX	LEADER
CPU	FAIR	EXCELLENT	FAIR	GOOD	PS2
GRAPHICS/SOUND	FAIR	POOR	GOOD	EXCELLENT	XBOX
SOFTWARE	FAIR	EXCELLENT	FAIR	GOOD	PS2
STRATEGY	FAIR	EXCELLENT	POOR	GOOD	PS2
FEATURES	GOOD	FAIR	FAIR	EXCELLENT	XBOX

WINNER OF THIS ROUND: PLAYSTATION 2 (MASSIVELY)



ROUND 6: WII LOVE THE LIVE STYLE

Despite Microsoft's modest success with the Xbox, it was assumed that coming into the next-generation, Sony would be a shoe-in to maintain dominance for a third time in a row with the PlayStation 3. However, things have not gone as planned for the current champion of the industry. Microsoft's announcement of the Xbox 360 at E3 '05 turned all eyes to Sony for news of the PS3. However, Microsoft had managed to get a head start, and Sony was nowhere near ready to launch its next console. Nintendo mostly played down its strategy, but there are rumours of big things to come.

Xbox 360's launch was met with high demand and shortages, which caused it to become a household word overnight. It quickly became apparent that the first Xbox was merely a Beta test, a throwaway project by Microsoft to learn how to play in the industry. The success of Live caused it to become the new focus of the machine, which features massive improvements to ergonomics, aesthetics, and seamless integration of Live with games. Microsoft's move to put low cost games on Xbox Live Arcade also drove the popularity of the new machine. Microsoft started to tackle the trouble spots, such as the notoriously fussy Japanese market, by throwing money at developers.

Meanwhile, Sony kept finding one pitfall after another with the PlayStation 3. Despite claims that Sony could match Microsoft's global launch the following year, they were forced to scale back and announce that the PS3 would only ship in Japan and the US in 2006. This would give Microsoft two uncontested holiday seasons throughout the rest of the world, and shortages of PS3s would also give them another strong season in the US. The PS3's price was cause for some concern, conjuring memories of the price tags of the 3DO and Neo Geo. Constant delays and last minute specification changes provided headaches for developers, who were already wary of the complexity of the radically different Cell CPU, which the new console would feature. Despite all the negative news, Sony's attitude has resembled the previous arrogance of the Nintendo of the past, which should serve as a warning to anyone who remembers the fall of the N64.

In the midst of all this battling for dominance, Nintendo seemed to get up and walk away. After being secretive for so long, it revealed the revolutionary controller that the new console would feature, and named it the Wii. Despite initial jokes regarding the name, the brand took off and quickly spread throughout the industry, for the very reasons it was initially mocked. This resulted in an effective establishment of branding and advertising for the new machine before its launch. Nintendo's decision to go with, what amounts to a higher clocked GameCube with a new controller, puts it in a position to launch at a lower price point and with better availability than the PS3 in 2006. The fact that so many games will be unique to the Wii, combined with a far lower price point, means that many gamers will buy it as a second console. However, what Nintendo really hopes to do is to duplicate its success with the casual gaming and older markets it has started to tap with the DS handheld. By focusing on these larger markets, which the competition ignores, it may be the Wii that has the last laugh at the end of this generation.



XBOX 360



PLAYSTATION 3





WII



LOOKING AHEAD

It's fairly obvious that Sony's emperor may be lacking a few articles of clothing at this point. With the possibility of a bad launch, the PS3 may find itself slipping behind the 360 quite quickly. The delays and lower projected sales have earned the ire of developers who were betting on enough consoles to be sold, to push their games. More and more formerly exclusive PS3 titles seem to be announcing 360 versions, and the Blu-ray format that Sony claims the PS3 will bring to the masses (or is it the Blu-ray drive that will drive PS3 sales?), seems to have been largely ignored by the home video market. Many assume that having been on top for so long, Sony can't possibly fail. However, the arrogance they show regarding their hardware and developers is reminiscent of a Nintendo riding high after a NES and SNES-dominated decade.

Microsoft seems to have finally gotten on the

ball, despite launch shortages that generated more hype and free publicity than they did consumer resentment. Xbox Live has become central to their strategy, knowing that Sony currently has nothing comparable. Even if they make the attempt, it will be a generation behind what the already mature Live offers. Despite launching a year earlier, it appears their hardware will be a close match for the PS3's final specifications, and their expertise in software tools has made them the favourite of both mainstream and independent developers.

Nintendo's complete right-angle strategy will most likely pay off. By not competing head-on and going for lower pricing, they have positioned themselves quite well to be the second console in every home, whether the first is a PS3 or a 360. That, combined with a successful appeal to casual gamers, may be enough to bring them back from the brink of the last two generations. **NAG**

LESSONS LEARNED

So what has history taught us? Looking at the similarities of each generation, there are a few things that stand out:

1. Software is the most important part of a successful console. No console with poor software has ever done well, and the console with the best software usually wins in the end;
2. Marketing strategy and good launch timing are second only to software quality and availability in importance;
3. Raw hardware power and fancy graphics won't save the day. Even with a significant gap, inferior machines can dominate by having superior developers developing superior games for them; and
4. Unique features are good, but only when they're built into the console. Consumers almost never buy 'upgrades' or add-ons for consoles that only work with a few games, and developers usually shun a console that will only run their game if it has a specific upgrade or peripheral, unless that peripheral is bundled with the game.

RANKINGS	XBOX 360	PLAYSTATION 3	WII	LEADER
CPU	GOOD	EXCELLENT	FAIR	PS3
GRAPHICS/SOUND	EXCELLENT	EXCELLENT	GOOD	PS3
SOFTWARE	EXCELLENT	FAIR	EXCELLENT	Xbox 360
STRATEGY	EXCELLENT	POOR	EXCELLENT	Wii
FEATURES	EXCELLENT	FAIR	EXCELLENT	Xbox 360

PREDICTED WINNER: XBOX 360 (IN THE CLOSEST RACE SINCE SNES VS. GENESIS)



GAME OVER

EPILOGUE RIP 360 INSIDER

I WAS ASKED QUITE SUDDENLY, while cooking dinner, if I wanted to write something about the passing of *360 Insider*. Considering there won't be one with this magazine, I can only guess that you've already found out that there is something missing. However, let's be less maudlin for a bit; the supplement-soon-to-be-magazine *360 Insider* just couldn't support itself. There were simply not enough interested advertisers to keep printing *360 Insider* without making it a serious financial burden, and that's just that in business speak.

My goal, as editor for *360 Insider*, was to keep it really positive and enthusiastic about the 360 and everything about it. I dared myself not to write a single negative news piece about the 360 and its vision in *360 Insider*. You might go so far as to call it fan boyish. You see, we've always kept NAG a more conservative magazine, be it intentional or not, but with *360 Insider* I could cut loose and be blatantly honest for a while. I wouldn't have to worry about who might get upset, since the Insider would only be read by other enthusiastic people, right?



Right. In that sense, I think I succeeded; reader feedback on *360 Insider* has been overwhelmingly supportive, mature and downright pleasurable. It was only three months, three issues, I know... but you know how it is when you're having fun; either it's over too soon or it ends up lasting an eternity.

It was fun buddy; I'll see you on Xbox Live sometime...

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Trashcat is not amused.



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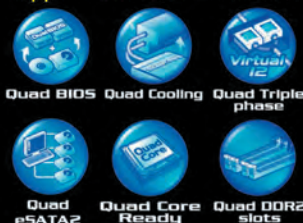
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